Virtual Options in Business Today

by Sophia

How has business changed in your lifetime? What are those practices business is doing differently now than they did even a few years ago? This tutorial will cover virtual options for businesses in the modern world. Our discussion breaks down as follows:

1. Virtual Options

Virtual options are especially important now, given the globalized community in which we live. Businesses need to have a virtual presence. Not only is this a relevant option for organizations today, but it's almost required in the global business world that we live in now today.

> **IN CONTEXT**
> Around 1992, Pizza Hut started allowing people to order their pizzas from an online source. This created a virtual presence beyond simply having a web page to showcase advertising for a business--it actually drove e-commerce forward. In addition, because it was on the worldwide web, it gave Pizza Hut a presence in the virtual world that it didn't have before, and helped drive their brand and their business.

As mentioned, a virtual presence can create a global opportunity. Simply because you're on the world wide web, now people from all over the globe have access to you as customers--and as potential employees.

In order to understand and manage a virtual presence, it is important to understand some of the infrastructures that are used to operate such a presence.

Virtual Infrastructures	Description
Intranet	This is the non-public network of an organization that employees can gain entry to, via the internet. An intranet is closely held within an organization, and while employees can access it through the internet, not *everybody* can. It's protected from the general public. This makes it much easier for employees to access internal information that only those employees need in order to do their jobs well. This is very important for virtual organizations, especially in order to structure and manage their business.
	This is a controlled network that allows specific users from outside an organization to

Extranet	access part or all of an organization's intranet. This is a case where customers can access the product or service that they want to use or buy from an external source for external use.
Local Area Network (LAN)	This is a group of computers that are networked within a limited physical location, such as a building or a very small geographic area. It allows companies to connect different workers throughout the organization and share sensitive information within it that they don't necessarily want to risk releasing into the outside world.
Wide Area Network (WAN)	This is a group of computers that are networked in a large area and includes several local area networks. So, if you have a larger company with a larger base or footprint, you can use a wide area network to connect those local area networks together. Again, this is something that is strictly internal to a company and does not allow access to outside internet users, but it allows users to share data across a wide area, geographically.

📄 **TERMS TO KNOW**

Intranet
The nonpublic network of an organization that employees can gain entry to via the internet.

Extranet
A controlled network that allows specific users from outside an organization to access part or all of an organization's intranet.

Local Area Network
A group of computers that are networked within a limited physical location.

Wide Area Network
A group of computers that are networked in a large area and includes several local area networks.

2. Working Accommodations

The working accommodations that have been affected by the virtual community. In order to accommodate limited office space or as a way to improve employee morale and satisfaction, more organizations are offering their employees ways to work from home or in another remote location instead of going to the office every day.

- **Flextime programs**: Programs that allow employees to set their own work hours, within some guidelines. This flexibility helps to improve employee morale, because employees are not necessarily tied to, say, the hours of nine to five at a particular work site. This also allows for job satisfaction with workers because they can adjust their schedules to fit with other things in their life, like picking up the kids or running necessary errands. If they had a set schedule, they wouldn't be able to do this.
- **Telecommuting**: A work agreement where employees can perform their job duties from a remote location. Again, this really does help with employee morale, and it promotes greater job satisfaction with employees because it allows workers to not have to commute to work.
- **Portable offices**: A specific laptop computer that recreates the business environment for the purpose of work. These can also help improve employee morale because they allow people to work remotely and not have any deficit as far as what is available to them within a work environment. If there are proprietary

programs that you need to use on the computer, you can recreate that work experience on a laptop. This, in turn, allows people to telecommute or use these portable offices in flextime schedules.

⚙ THINK ABOUT IT

Think about all the possible negative factors involved in commuting to work, that can be remedied by telecommuting. You're not wasting that hour or more every day, each way, just trying to get to your desk to do your work. You'd be putting less congestion on the street and using less natural resources by not commuting to work. You'd also be able to be more productive and flexible with your time because you don't have to go to a physical location. Note, this is all driven through virtual options like the intranet, and local area and wide area networks within a company that employees can have access to.

📄 TERMS TO KNOW

Flextime Programs
A program to allow employees to set their own work hours within some guidelines.

Telecommuting
A work agreement where employees can perform their job duties from a remote location.

Portable Offices
A specific laptop computer that recreates the business environment for the purpose of work.

📋 SUMMARY

Today we learned about those **virtual options** that are available for businesses today. We also learned about some **working accommodations** like flextime programs, telecommuting, and portable offices that help drive employee satisfaction and morale, and ultimately improve the efficiency of the business.

Good luck!

Source: adapted from sophia instructor james howard

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