How to take your small business to the next level

In this ebook, we provide you with everything that your SME needs to catapult it to dizzying new heights. Find out how the world of work is changing for businesses of all sizes, how you need to adapt your small business for the new world, and how the cloud can help you succeed — through next-level collaboration, professionalism and productivity.

Enjoy!

What's inside ›

Together we can

vodafone business

What's inside

Click on a button below to jump to a chapter and tap the burger to come back here >
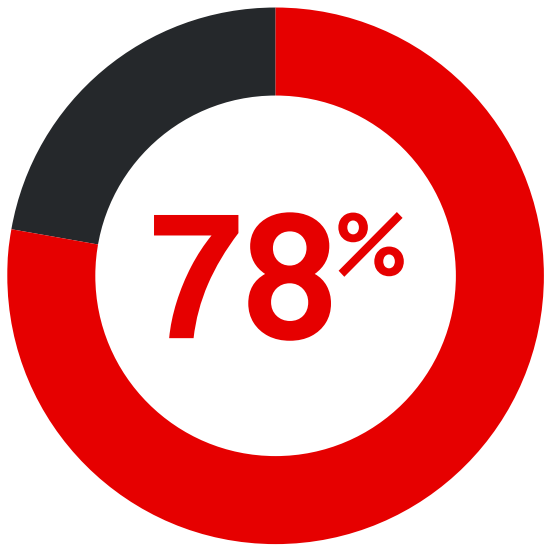
New ways of working

You don't need us to tell you that today's world of work looks entirely different to that of 2019.

Pre-Covid, 'hybrid working' was a rarely used term. But today, it's the preferred working model of 59% of people. Here are some more interesting facts about the current world of work and some predictions for how 2023 will look:

78%
of people who work from home in some capacity say that being able to do so gives them an improved work-life balance
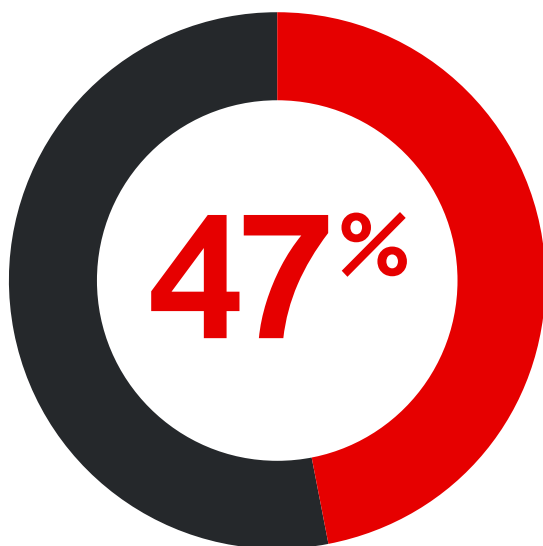
47%
of workers say working from home improves their wellbeing
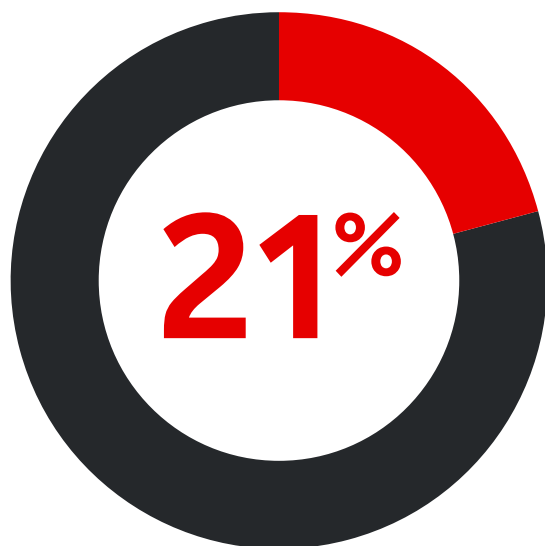
21%
of people who quit their jobs in 2021 say they did so because of a lack of flexible working hours or location

29%
say they get more done at home
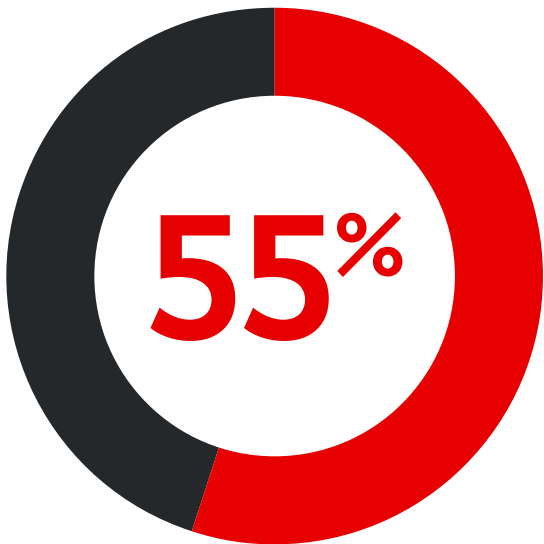
55%
say they concentrate better working from home
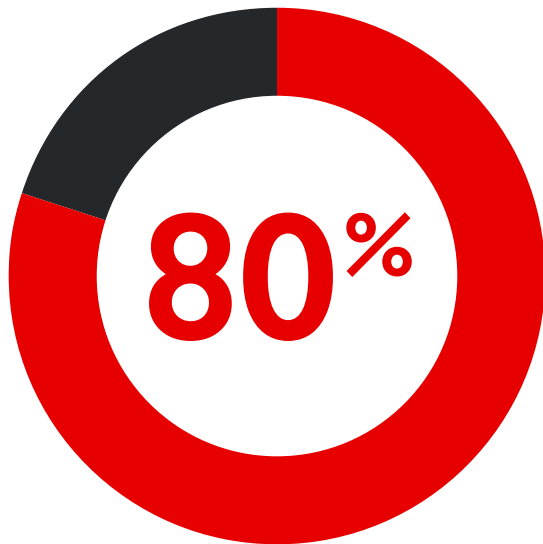
80%
of people would recommend home working to a friend

80%
are able to accomplish all their tasks remotely[1]

[1] https://thehomeofficelife.com/blog/work-from-home-statistics [2] https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/12/work-jobs-workplace-trends-2023/

New ways of working

Predicted work trends of 2023 – how the world of work is changing.

01 Greater flexibility for workers
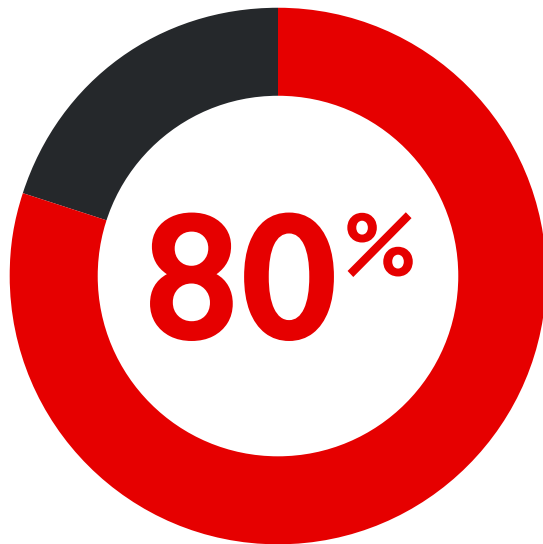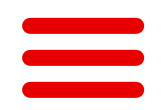Less and less people will accept a lack of flexibility when they are looking for roles – and more and more will expect to be able to work, at least some of the time, where and when suits them. Employers that aren't offering hybrid work and/or adaptability – as well as solid systems that effortlessly support this – will suffer when it comes to recruitment.

02 High levels of labour participation
The World Economic Forum believes that, given the current rates of inflation and resulting cost of living crisis, we can expect the number of people working to increase[2]. This should mean, in contrast to previous years, a greater availability of talent.

03 Requests for greater autonomy
When a company gives flexibility, what the individual gets is autonomy and choice – the ability, for example, to attend their child's sports day or take an hour away from their laptop at a time that suits them. Being able to dictate how their day looks will increasingly become the norm.

04 Investing in advanced technology
Given everything that we've seen about working trends, it's no surprise that more and more companies will seek out tech that supports these new models and endeavours to make the lives of all employees easier with the right tools, systems and platforms.

05 A greater focus on employee wellbeing
Awareness around mental health is at an all-time high. We also know that, although flexible and hybrid models are preferred, one of the downsides is a lack of connection and feelings of loneliness – especially in younger workers. All companies will be expected to prioritise the mental wellbeing of staff and act in ways that proactively improve it.

Why cloud adoption is important

Today, the vast majority of businesses – regardless of their shape or size – use the cloud for storage and sharing. We explore just some of the advantages of doing so.

Safety
Storing information and documents on the cloud ensures that should the unthinkable happen, your data is kept safe online. From a lost laptop to a fire in the office, businesses can save their data on the cloud safely and without sacrificing accessibility.
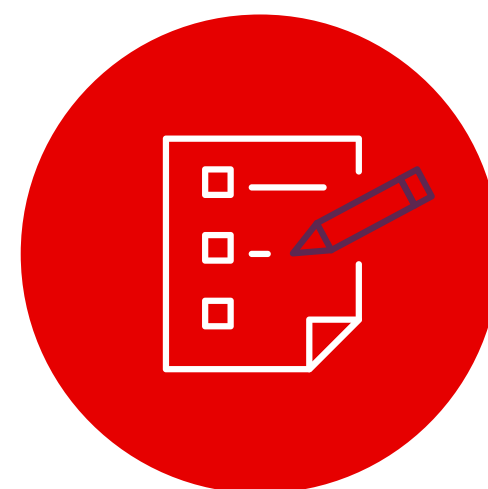
Flexibility
Instead of traditional software, cloud tools offer varied monthly plans that can be tailored to your business's needs – including as and when they change.

Organisation
You can control what information is stored and how. Within the cloud, you can create folders to organise your information in a way that suits you, making it easy for you to navigate and access.

Automation
Most cloud based solutions never need updating, maintaining or securing by a customer. The tools you use are automatically updated without the need for expertise from staff, or involvement from an IT department –saving you both time and money.

Collaboration
If a document is stored online, then it can worked on by multiple people, at anytime, anywhere in the world. This means that employees no longer have to email documents back and forth, which means more efficient work and more efficient staff!

Top tip
Consider a provider that is cloud-native – meaning that it started on the cloud and is run on the cloud. These partners will fully understand the complex nature of running your business this way and therefore offer you and your company a highly secure and reliable environment.

Next-level collaboration

Today, in order to navigate the new world of work, you need to ensure that your hybrid team feels as integrated as possible.

In 2023, strong company collaboration will look like:

01

The ability to work as one, no matter where you are
Most of us have learnt the hard way that emailing documents back and forth is a long way from ideal when it comes to minimising version control errors. And in this day and age, no matter where you or your employees are, you should be able to work on one document at the same time without encountering both problems and confusion.

02

Using automation to your advantage
Tech should be harnessed as much as possible to make your life easier. Certain platforms can for example, help with autocorrections, and some tools even ensure that when employees are tagged with an urgent task, they receive calendar appointments and/or automated lists, meaning that the chances of deadlines being missed is minimised. Consider AI, too, and the different ways that it might be able to support you and your employees – from intelligent suggestions and content created at speed, to data-driven decisions.

03

Rock solid communication
Research found that one in five employees feel lonely at work on a typical working day, and almost a quarter agreed that feeling lonely at work has affected their mental health[3]. For these reasons, it's an extremely good idea to consider a package that has a range of communication tools – like chat, email, voice and video calling – at its heart. This should help employees stay connected to each other, feel less alone and know that someone is on hand and reachable should they need them. Similarly, your customers will have certain expectations when it comes to dealing with you, such as a company email address, and efficient video calling capabilities.
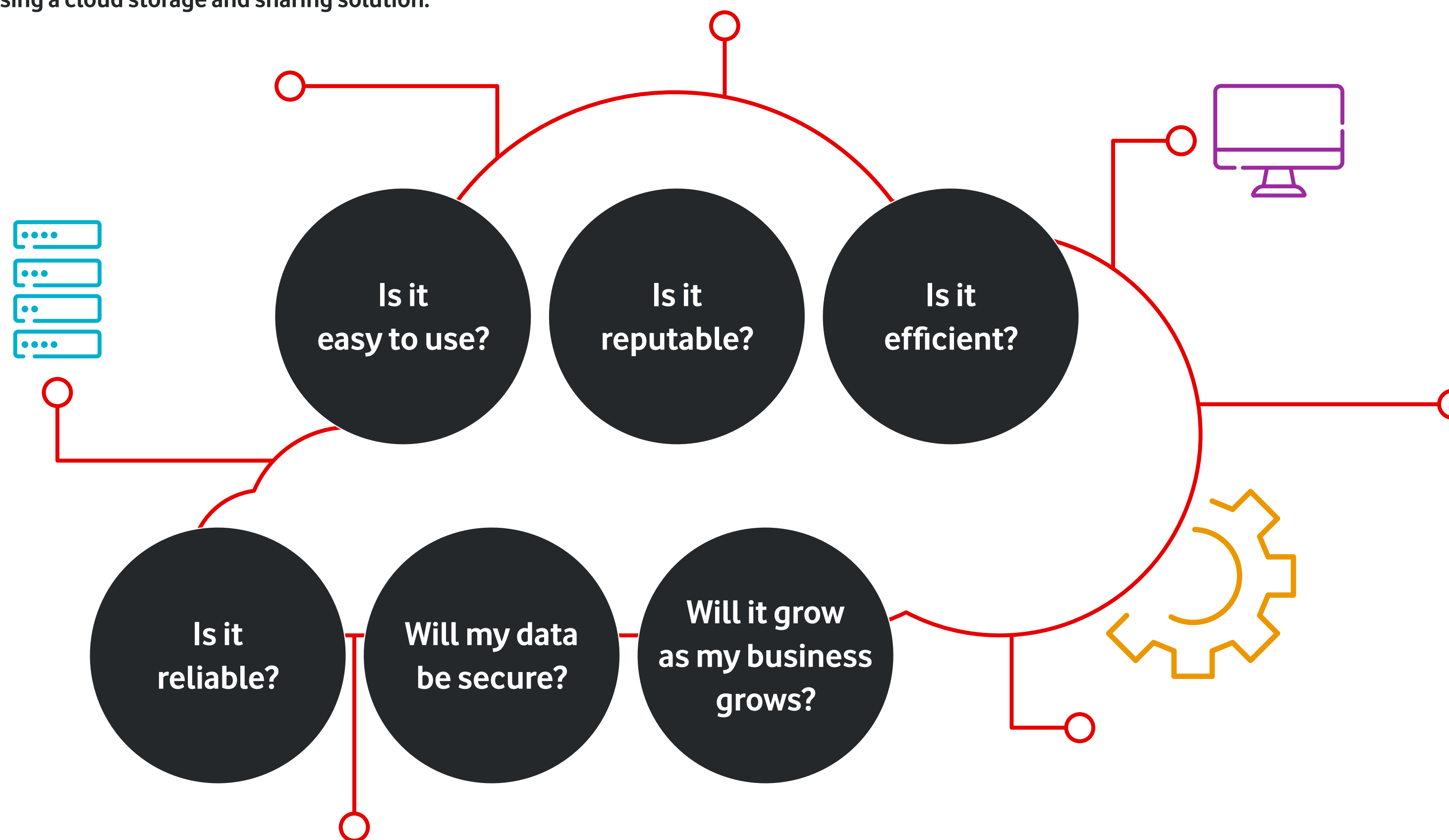
Next-level storage and sharing

'Work' is no longer the location it used to be. Now, the office is where we can be as productive as possible – and this could vary on a day-to-day basis. This means that today, your storage and sharing needs are entirely different to what they used to be.

Remote data storage in the cloud is becoming increasingly popular within businesses of all sizes. Cloud backup and file sharing allows users to access files and documents from multiple devices at any time, from anywhere, greatly improving a business's capability to share and protect their data. Cloud backup also removes the need to manage on-site technology resources.

But moving data to the cloud brings its own set of concerns. Can you, for example, trust cloud services to keep your data private when it is offsite and on servers you don't own or fully control?

This is where a trusted IT partner can evaluate the most secure tools and software for you, to provide peace of mind, and also build flexible IT solutions to help you retain control.

Here are some questions that you should yourself ask when choosing a cloud storage and sharing solution:

- Is it easy to use?
- Is it reputable?
- Is it efficient?
- Is it reliable?
- Will my data be secure?
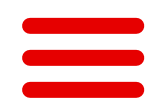- Will it grow as my business grows?

Top tip

Look for a package that allows users to seamlessly transition across devices – such as mobile, tablets and desktops, as needed.

Next-level professionalism

When selecting partners and suppliers, other companies will have certain expectations. Here, we provide an overview so that, despite being an SME, you look as efficient and experienced as possible.

01 Company email addresses
Nothing says start-up or homespun like a personal email address — these don't exactly scream secure, either. Instead, get an email address that matches your domain name. This is simple and inexpensive to do but can make a world of difference.

02 Invoice professionally and promptly
You won't stay in business long if you don't get paid. Two factors will help you here — a contract and prompt invoicing. With regards to a contract, seek the help of a professional. When it comes to invoicing, consider investing in a programme that will make creating and sending professional invoices painless. You may even be able to accept payments online through them, too.

03 Create content
What you should be generating will depend on your audience — so take the time to research what your competitors are doing and use this as a jumping off point. It could be that your focus should be on attention-grabbing social media, or perhaps in-depth blogs or even whitepapers are what would build engagement. You might also want to look into how tech, such as AI, can be harnessed to make doing this easier. This could include, for example, autocorrections, speedier content creation or data-driven decision making.

Next-level productivity

When you run your own SME, time is money. Savings in both of these areas can make a world of difference to the success of your company, as well as to the happiness and therefore retention of your employees. Here, we offer tips on how to make your small business as efficient as possible.

01

Make security a priority from the get-go
Too many businesses only start to take the issue of security seriously once they have experienced a breach themselves. Instead, companies need to ensure that they have appropriate measures in place no matter where their employees are based, and that all employees are fully clued up on what certain attacks — such as phishing — could look like, and what to do if they suspect they have been targeted.

02

Invest in the right online tools
Today, there's a wealth of apps, tools, platforms and partners who can help streamline your business activities and ensure efficiencies in terms of time and money. When considering what to invest in, put yourself in the shoes of your employees and customers. What systems are they already familiar with and fond of? How can you ensure that you appear as professional as possible, and to what extent can all useful and relevant apps be found in one place, and be used intuitively across all necessary devices?

03

Reduce stress
This isn't a challenge that can be overcome overnight. Instead, it requires the right workplace culture to be embedded — this is even more important in the new world of work — and for managers to lead by example. This could look like taking the right amount of downtime or talking openly about their own struggles with stress and how they overcame them.

04

Ensure effective collaboration and connectivity
We're all still finding our feet in this new world — one where hybrid working is the norm. This means that we're faced with challenges that just weren't there three years ago, including teams that don't feel as close-knit as they once did, and the inability to hold as many face-to-face meetings as we used to. That being said, the right systems can help plug some of these gaps. Look for solutions that make it easy for teams to work securely as one, anywhere, anytime, and that enable employees to chat, come together and work together in real time.

05

Do whatever you can to minimise errors
A very real risk of remote working is version control; the majority of us have learnt the hard way that emailing documents back and forth often leads to mix ups and mistakes. When investigating the right platform and partner for you, consider certain scenarios. How can, for example, you make it as easy as possible for employees to edit documents at the same time without problems occurring? Are the video meeting capabilities as strong as they can be, lessening the chance of disruption?

5 ways subscription-based support can benefit your business

Here are five reasons why SMEs should seriously consider investing in packages that can help with everything from saving time and money to simplifying workstreams.

When you're running your own company, or are a key decision maker in one, you're weighing up whether certain investments are worth the expense. Is now the right time, for example, to invest in new IT equipment; and are there services that, despite a small, regular outlay, would make your life easier? So, what can subscription-based business support packages offer your SME?

01 Saving you time
The right platform will feature a whole host of tools and services that you can easily access as and when you need them. This means a smoother way of working and less time spent trying to find the app that you need next.

02 ...and money
Prices often start at a couple of pounds a month, per user, and offer a host of different tools that will support your business and its individual needs — no matter its shape or size. And because you're opting for a single package as opposed to numerous ones from several different providers, you're only making one payment a month.

03 Great efficiency
A recent study found the average business spends the equivalent of more than a week per year on administrative tasks. But despite the fact that much of this time could be saved with software, just 45% of SMEs are using technology to manage their admin workload[4]. Could you, for example, use software to help with your invoicing, file sharing, managing customer data or even your email marketing?

04 Simplified workstreams
The right project management software can help you plan, organise, and manage workstreams and projects on a single platform. This means that everyone knows what they're working on at any given moment, and a lot less time is wasted.

05 Safety and security
No matter how small your business, you need to put security front and centre. The right subscription-based business support package will not only provide you with intuitive apps and industry-leading tech, it should also offer you enhanced safety, proactive protections to help keep users safe and intelligent security insights that reduce risks.

Final thoughts...

Creation, connection and collaboration are at the heart of Google Workspace, which is already used by billions of people around the world.

Google Workspace also started on the cloud and runs on the cloud, so it's no surprise that the people behind it fully understand the complex nature of running your business this way. Because of this, Google Workspace can offer you and your company a highly secure and reliable environment.

Plans start at as little as £4.60* per user per month and there's a number of options, including flexible plans, on offer depending on your business's requirements. To find out more about Google Workspace, visit...

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