

5 tips for running a virtual office

Industry 4.0 is changing the way we do business, particularly the traditional concept of workspace. Reputation Matters, a proudly African research agency, has been successfully working from a virtual office space since 2008 and shares five tips for acing it.



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A virtual office is an office that exists almost entirely in cyberspace. Employees are free to work from anywhere that has an internet connection. Working from home or a coffee shop, or even from the side lines of a youngster's soccer match, is commonplace. "Benefits of the virtual office include cost cutting on items like physical office maintenance, increased employee happiness and productivity as the daily commute is eliminated and they spend more time with family," says Regine le Roux, managing director at Reputation Matters.

Le Roux explains that a virtual office does require a shift from the traditional office mentality and shares some tips for making it work:

#1: Get the right people on board. It takes discipline and a high level of intrinsic motivation for employees to work from home. Management needs to be able to trust them to deliver quality work within agreed timelines. "We have an extensive recruitment process that gauges potential employees' ability to work remotely," says le Roux.

#2: Have the right tools in place. Employees require functional laptops, cellphones, and internet connection to work from anywhere. The virtual office also requires cloud storage and digital systems for scheduling, conferencing, and task management; luckily, there are a host of business applications for every aspect of the business.

#3: Have set team get-togethers. Convenient as the virtual office is, employees may feel increasingly isolated. “We have weekly Skype meetings and I make a point of it to check in telephonically with each employee for a monthly one-on-one. Monthly we also meet up for ‘Cheers for Peers’, an initiative that celebrates employee achievements with regional teams meeting face-to-face for a fun activity,” suggests le Roux.

#4: Have set office hours. With increased connectivity comes the temptation to simply never switch off. Nowhere is this truer than in a virtual office, where the home environment often doubles as the office. “I encourage my team to only be online after 7am and to switch off by 7pm, a balanced lifestyle key for productivity,” explains le Roux.

#5: Have a professional office. Consider investing in a shared office space. This will enhance the reputation of your business when you need to host face-to-face client meeting. There are several service providers who give access to such leased office spaces for a fraction of the cost that it would take to buy and maintain a business property.

“We often read that the virtual office and flexible working hours is ‘the way of the future’ and we are proud to have stepped into the future long ago,” says le Roux.

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