

Homeworking: A flexible working culture

Learn how homeworking at LV= has boosted morale, improved customer experience, raised productivity and delivered a £2.3 million return on investment.

Summary

A new homeworking scheme for existing colleagues has grown to include 147 people from the pilot scheme of just 39 volunteers. A host of practical initiatives were developed to support the full roll-out, with the aim to have up to 300 homeworkers by the end of 2016. Homeworkers are top performers, there is a marked difference in service and there is strong focus on communication within the team. The customer journey is nearly 10% shorter with homeworkers, they make 33% fewer transfers and are four times more likely to fulfil overtime requests. Recruitment is via a special assessment centre to test suitability and Homeworkers need to provide a suitable working environment at home. Above all, the chance to work at home is highly prized and 97% of homeworkers rated their happiness in role as a 10 out of 10.

Key initiatives

A people-focussed strategy with big business rewards

At LV= there is an all-pervasive belief that if you look after your employees, the business performance will look after itself. Homeworking began because people were asking for this flexibility; it grew in scale as others understood the benefits they were gaining. Crucially, what started as a benefit for employees has had staggering benefits for the business, including: an almost 10% reduction in AHT; 10% increase in productivity; 33% reduction in call transfers; and a 2% increase in adherence. Plus, homeworkers are making planning easier, as they are able to take on split shifts and overtime (they take 40% of the contact centre's overtime requirement). Both customers and advisors report a better experience, as there are fewer distractions and less ambient noise, making for a clearer, more focussed interaction. "The biggest barrier was the perception of an internal culture that said homeworking was the preserve of senior management" "Shows how LV= puts people first" "Pilot participants begged us not to take it away" "A marked difference in service" "All my homeworkers are in the top ten performers each month" "A benefit to potential recruits" "Makes me proud".

Making it work part 1: the people

Selecting the right people is vitally important. LV= looks for at least 12 months experience in the contact centre, with competent performance and attendance. An assessment centre ensures candidates have the confidence to work alone. Once accepted, a great deal of effort goes into making sure homeworkers remain engaged and motivated, including extra training for team leaders, daily catch up phone calls, and extensive use of messaging. There is a homeworking newsletter and they are encouraged to take part in charity events and team socials. Team leaders are based in the office and it's important for homeworkers to have the option to come in for team meetings and appraisals. Frequency of these is flexible and advisors are trusted to organise their own time in collaboration with their manager. The key to success is a dedicated project manager, who acts as an essential conduit between senior management and frontline CSRs. "Less isolating than the contact centre" "More effort is made with communication" "I call the homeworkers in my team at least once a day" "It isn't really different".



"This wasn't done to cut costs, it was because our people asked us for more flexibility. But the benefits have been so great, I wish we had done it earlier."

Peter Sinden,
Director of Sales & Service

"It has transformed my life – I have quit smoking, and I am now able to do exercise at lunchtime."

Lorraine Young,
Homeworker

"Homeworkers don't transfer calls as much. It's a bit like learning to drive: if you have someone next to you, you will ask them to double check, but once you are on your own you just react to the situation and get on with it."

Chris Senior,
Team Manager

"I work at home, but I'm still invited to team meetings and I come into the office for important updates."

Matt Bennett,
Homeworker

Results

- 97% of homeworkers said they were more than happy in their role
- Homeworkers are 10% more productive than in-office CSRs and make 33% fewer transfers
- Sickness is much lower (1.8% vs 5%). Adherence is 2% higher
- Homeworkers are 4 times more likely to fulfil overtime requests
- The customer journey is 10% shorter with homeworkers thanks to reduced noise and distractions



Making it work part 2: IT and planning

Homeworkers are required to provide a suitable working environment at home, which includes: a room with a door that can be closed; a desk; a chair; and adequate broadband connectivity and speed. From an IT perspective, each homeworker is treated as a virtual office and they are provided with a phone, PC, monitor, mouse, and a 3-meter Ethernet cable (wireless broadband is not permitted). This 'dummy terminal' gives them access to the LV= network, with no data physically stored on the machine and no access to external Internet sites. There is a strict 4-hour SLA with the IT helpdesk for resolving network issues. If equipment is broken, an outsourced provider simply replaces the hardware and takes the old one away to be fixed. Homeworkers are viewed as a virtual site by the planning team, who have been instrumental in realising the benefits of homeworking. "The planning team has been at the heart of this" "No risk ... there's no data on the PC at home" "The flexibility and agility is amazing" "Other parts of the business are now asking for this".

The psychological contract of trust

Monitoring homeworkers and their targets is exactly the same as in-office employees. Homeworking is seen as a special opportunity and makes homeworkers want to do a better job, to stay with the company, to be trustworthy. Sickness among homeworkers runs at just 1.8%, compared to 5% in the office. The benefits (increased flexibility, zero travel time and costs, and increased income through split shifts/overtime) make homeworking very attractive. This mutual trust and commitment is paying huge dividends for both advisors and the business. It's surely just a matter of time before many more contact centres offer homeworking as an alternative flexible working strategy. "It's like being my own boss" "Time I would have spent travelling I can now spend with my family" "It's the best thing that has ever happened to me".

"This was never about monetary gain ... we focussed on the benefits for employees and incremental benefits such as reduced attrition and improvements in productivity."

Hailey Burchell,
Business Improvement Manager

"We don't plan the performance of homeworkers any differently, but once you have seen improvements in adherence and talk time, you can start taking these things into account."

Gordon Fraser,
Senior Operational Planning Manager

"It's the best decision I've ever made. I'm saving 10 hours a week by not commuting, plus it's improved my social life because I have more time to go out when I've finished work."

Margaret Richardson,
Homeworker

"We can easily generate reports on what is happening with the homeworking infrastructure – we can quickly identify trends and deal with potential problems."

Rob Layton,
Portfolio Manager, CIO Change Delivery

"If my team are happy, it creates a lot less work for me. My homeworkers are extremely happy."

Rachel Harris,
Team Manager

"Training is focussed around two key areas – new people becoming homeworkers and training for team leaders who manage them."

Jemma Green,
Operational Training Consultant

LV= set up in 1843, serves over 6 m customers with a range of financial products. LV= employs 6,000 people, around 3,000 in the contact centres staff across 8 sites, including Bournemouth, Bristol & Croydon. Systems used for customer interaction include Avaya for workforce optimisation & call recording, IQ and CMS. An Azzuri toolbar controls Avaya handsets & Symon wallboards.