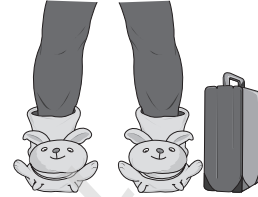


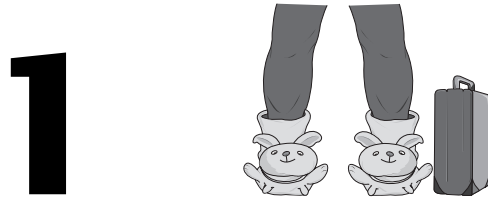
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# E-work, the Bare Essentials

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## Who E-works and What Do They Do?

*Imagine organizations in which bosses give employees enormous freedom to decide what to do and when to do it. Imagine electing your own bosses and voting directly on important company decisions. Imagine organizations in which most workers aren't employees at all, but electronically connected freelancers living wherever they want to. And imagine that all this freedom in business lets people get more of whatever they really want in life—money, interesting work, the chance to help others, or time with their families.<sup>1</sup>*

—Thomas W. Malone, *The Future of Work*

About 14 million people run home-based businesses or freelance in their frillies.<sup>2</sup> In addition, depending on who you ask and how they count, somewhere between 5 million<sup>3</sup> and 12 million<sup>4</sup> Americans hold jobs that allow them to work at home in various states of undress.

The counting problem isn't because no one has bothered to study the work-at-home population. The IRS, Bureau of Census, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Small Business Administration, and a number of private researchers all collect data about people who work from home. But they all come at it with their own needs and biases. Some researchers count small businesses, others don't. Some surveys include people who work from home as little as one day a year, while others focus on people who primarily work from home. Some fail to distinguish between paid and unpaid work. None separate out those employees and business owners who work *at* home from those who work *from* home.

Bruce Phillips, a researcher for the National Federation of Independent Business, described during an interview the task of trying to find the real work-at-home numbers as “a statistical Vietnam—the data goes

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in, but you can't get it out." As a result, studying the work-at-home population is a little like trying to study meteoroids. We know there are a lot of them and we know they're important, but we don't know where they all are and not everyone agrees on which ones to count. Still, based on what we *do* know, we can begin to develop a model that's helpful.

E-work by the Numbers

While it's true that figures lie and liars figure, statistics do offer a useful insight into the nature of e-workers. Surveys show that men outnumber women e-workers five to three.<sup>5</sup> Four out of five e-workers are married or cohabitating,<sup>6</sup> and three-quarters are college grads.<sup>7</sup> Fifteen percent are over age 55.<sup>8</sup> Forty percent have a household income over \$75,000 a year,<sup>9</sup> and only about a third of those who work at home for an employer have been with the company for less than two years.<sup>10</sup>

So a forty-year-old, college-educated, married man, who's been with his employer for five years is a shoo-in right? No, not really. There are lots of thirty-year-old, high-school educated, single women who e-work too.

The Nature of E-work

A program called *Workplace Flexibility 2010* was started by Georgetown University to help policy makers and corporate leaders understand the need for more flexible work environments. They examined the jobs that

**Table 1.1** Best E-work Jobs Involve These Processes

Analysis	Editing
Auditing	E-mail correspondence
Budget preparation	Evaluations
Calculating	Graphics
Computer	Internet research
programming	Planning
Conceptual work	Project management
Contract administration	Reading
Concept development	Record keeping
Data entry	Transcribing dictation
Database maintenance	Telephone contacts
Design work	Thinking
Dictating	Word processing
Drafting	Writing

**Table 1.2** Best Job Categories

Professional	20%
Sales	17%
Technical	16%
Manager	12%
Clerical	9%
Supervisor	7%
Service	6%
Executive/senior manager	4%
Crafts/skills trades	3%
Operative	3%
Laborers	2%
Other	2%

offer the best fit for home-based work. Table 1.1 is a summary of their findings.<sup>11</sup>

You'll note that many of these skills are common to professional, technical, or sales functions. In fact, those types of jobs account for over half of all e-work. Table 1.2 summarizes the best job categories for e-working.<sup>12</sup>

If you look at the industries where those skills are dominant, as Table 1.3 demonstrates, business services accounts for the highest percentage.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 1.3** Best Industries for E-work

Business services	12.3%
Health care services	9.1%
Electronics and computer manufacturing	7.9%
Government/public administration	6.9%
Retail/wholesale	6.4%
Communication services	5.9%
Other/farming/forestry	5.9%
Heavy manufacturing	4.9%
Education	4.4%
Transportation services	4.2%
Construction/engineering	3.9%
Light manufacturing	2.9%
Health care products	2.9%
Food industry	2.7%
Banking services	2.2%
Accounting legal	2.2%
Other financial (insurance and real estate)	1.2%
Restaurant	0.2%
Other personal services	0.2%
Hotel services	0.1%

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As we mentioned earlier, some of these industries, such as construction and real estate, don't truly offer the opportunity to work at home—that just happens to be where they're based.

### The Trade-offs

Landing an e-work job or starting a home-based business may require retraining, and even a change in lifestyle. For many, the desire to work from home is worth the effort.

Robert is a registered nurse specializing in pediatric care. He wanted to work at home so he could be there if his wheelchair-bound father needed him. He found e-work as a telenurse. It meant a cut in pay, but being available for his father was more important.

Eleanor had a good job as a corporate bookkeeper but decided to freelance so she could spend more time with her kids. It meant a less stable income, but she says the move has really improved their quality of life.

Jim, an at-home legal transcriptionist, has a law degree but frequently moves because of his wife's military career. He doesn't practice law anymore, but he *can* take his job with him wherever she goes.

In the chapters that follow, you'll read how millions of others have made the road less traveled their way to work, and how you can too.