

PA ENTERPRISE

DeskDemon's Magazine for Executive PAs, Office Managers and Secretaries

October/November 2020

What is a line manager?

Essential software tools for remote work in 2020

Free ways to promote employee wellbeing

Best Zoom alternatives for video calling

Top 10 working from home lunches

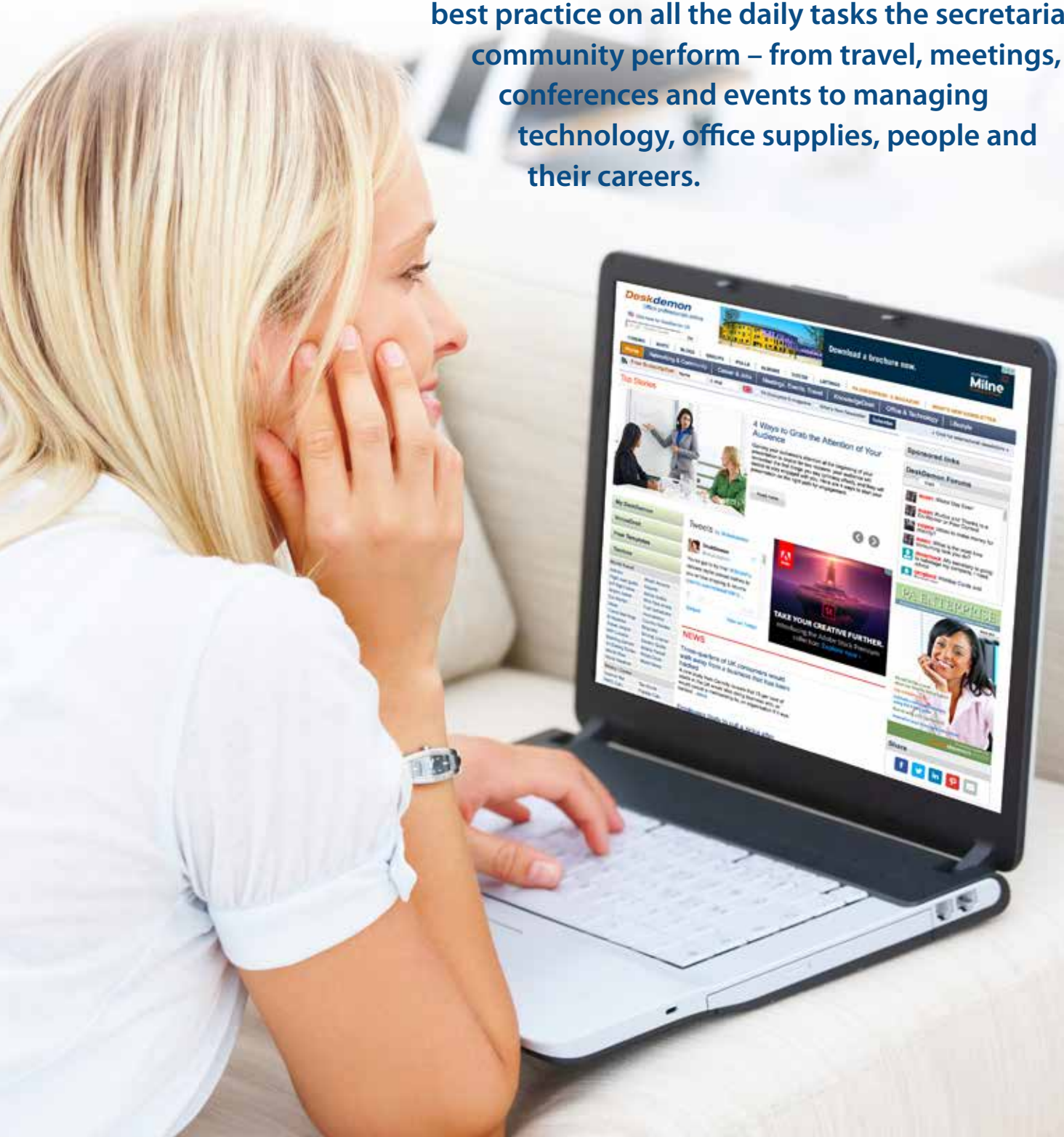
Top 15 Virtual Christmas Parties

PA Enterprise is published by

Deskdemon.com

As an office worker, where do you go for information, advice, tutorials, vital tools, training and relaxation?

DeskDemon is the world's largest resource, information and community site for Administrative Professionals, Executive PAs, secretaries, Administrators and Office Managers. Providing essential information, resources, tips, tricks, tools, quick links, templates, editorial features and best practice on all the daily tasks the secretarial community perform – from travel, meetings, conferences and events to managing technology, office supplies, people and their careers.





4 What is a line manager?

6 5 essential software tools for remote work in 2020

8 7 free ways to promote employee wellbeing

10 Best Zoom alternatives for video calling

13 Home workers rewarded with fresh coffee delivered to their door, courtesy of the boss

14 Initiative sees employees walk 42.5 million steps in six weeks

16 Top 10 working from home lunches

19 Two thirds of employees don't believe working from home full time makes them more productive

20 Top 15 Virtual Christmas Parties



PA ENTERPRISE MAGAZINE

www.deskdemon.com

Terminal House, Station Approach, Shepperton, Middlesex TW17 8AS

Editorial

editoruk@deskdemon.com

Advertising

Tel: 0870 410 4038

mek@deskdemon.com

Design & Production

Jane Bigos

Graphic Design

janebigos@deskdemon.com

Kulasekaram Vimalarasa (Raj)

Web Developer

raj@deskdemon.com

Managing Director

Mek Rahmani

Founder, CEO

mek@deskdemon.com

All rights reserved. No part of this Publication (whether in hardcopy or electronic form) may be copied, transmitted, or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording, photocopying, or otherwise, without the prior written consent of DeskDemon.com. Whilst every care is taken in the compilation and publication of this publication, DeskDemon.com can not be held responsible for any consequences, mistakes or omissions. DeskDemon.com can not accept any responsibility for any inaccuracies or changes, or for consequential loss arising from such changes or inaccuracies, or for any other loss. Inclusion of any advertisements does not imply recommendations or endorsement by DeskDemon.com.

Copyright 2020 DeskDemon.com



PA Enterprise is sent to DeskDemon UK e-newsletter, audited by ABCe (5th/6th July 2007) with a net distribution of 70,581 email addresses.

What is a line manager?

Looking to move into management? For anyone feeling ready to take on a managerial position, becoming a line manager is often an ideal first step. Not only can it be a potential stepping stone into a more senior position – in some instances, it could be even an essential part of helping your career progress.

What is a line manager?

A line manager is someone who is directly responsible for managing another member of staff or multiple staff members. They often report into a higher level of management in the company, but oversee the day-to-day duties of their team.

The role they perform is incredibly important in the running the operations of a business – giving more junior members of staff the guidance they need, and providing them with a link to those in more senior roles. They may also be known as supervisors, or team leaders.

Line manager responsibilities

Line managers are found in almost every industry, meaning their duties may change depending on where they work.

However, some common responsibilities of line managers could include:

- Managing employees
- Ensuring their team hit their targets
- Training staff, and planning out their development
- Coaching and mentoring their team members
- Reporting back to senior leadership on performance
- Overseeing budget lines
- Approving holidays and conducting back-to-work interviews
- Hiring and interviewing new team members

What skills do you need to become a line manager?

Becoming a good line manager means really understanding your members of staff, in order to get the best possible performance out of them on a daily basis.

They also need to know the business inside out, allowing them to provide vital information and support to their team, whenever necessary.

Key skills for line managers are:

- Excellent communication skills
- Prioritisation
- Delegation
- Objectivity
- Results-driven thinking
- Motivational skills

Line manager jobs

Line managers are needed in a variety of different sectors. From blue collar jobs in production and construction, through to retail and office roles.

In fact, although 'line manager' may not necessarily be in the job title (with team leader or supervisor sometimes preferred), line management responsibilities will be written in the job description – allowing you to find them easily when searching.

Line management may even be an option in your job, allowing you to progress within your



own organisation without the need for a formal promotion.

Line management courses

If you're looking to move into line management, there are many courses out there to help build your skillset.

Some great examples of training to look into include people management certifications, HR training for line managers, and objective setting. However, there are hundreds of options out there – allowing you to find the one which best suits you.

They may be offered by your employer, but can be taken independently too. And with many online options available, you'll have the flexibility to find one that fits your own schedule.

Tips to becoming a great line manager

All line managers work differently. However, here are some tips to help you on your way to become a great line manager:

Listen to your team – Part of being a great manager is learning how to listen. Really get to know your members of staff, find out their goals and what makes them tick. Not only will it help build trust, but it will also allow you to get the

most out of them.

Learn how to delegate – Just because you're responsible for your team, it doesn't mean you have to do all the hard work. Good delegation skills will lead to a more motivated team, with more autonomy (and, crucially, less micro-management).

Be accountable – There's no quicker way to lose the respect of someone you manage than to throw them under the bus. You are ultimately responsible for their output, good or bad. So ensure you're accountable for any mistakes – and that you work on mitigating against them in future.

Praise hard work – Always ensure you recognise when your team is performing well. Whether it's informing senior leadership, giving kudos over email, or just telling them yourself – hard work and dedication should never go unnoticed.

Plan their future – Finally, to get the most out of your staff, you should want them to progress. That means working on development plans with them to help them move on their career (even if it's no longer under your management), and empowering them to improve.

By Michael Cheary, reed.co.uk

5 essential software tools for remote work in 2020

As remote workers and virtual teams are on the rise, so is the number of tools and software that cater to remote workers. Working remotely requires planning and preparation. An important part of planning for success includes arming yourself with a toolbox of software that can help you reach your goals. Check out the following five essential software tools for remote work.



JotForm is the online form builder for everyone. You don't have to be a developer to use it because it's as easy as clicking and dragging. Select a template, add questions, publish, and watch the responses come in.

But it's JotForm's unmatched collaboration functionality that makes it the preferred online form tool. Collaboration is as easy as sharing a link with coworkers so multiple team members can work on the same form at the same time. There's no need to worry about whether you're working on the most recent version, because any changes are automatically saved in real time.

JotForm's revision history lets you view changes and revert to a previous version of a form if needed. You won't have any panicky moments, fearing your previous version is lost forever.



Described as a place "Where Work Happens," Slack is an instant messaging platform for work. It offers critical features like real-time messaging, file sharing, voice calls, a searchable archive, and screen sharing. These capabilities make it a perfect software solution for remote workers because it's easy to collaborate with team members wherever you are.

Essentially, it serves as a hub, providing:

- **Channels organized by project, topic, or team**
- **Searchable messages and files so you can find information when you need it**
- **Integration with other tools and services you already use**
- **Security that ensures the safety of your conversations and files**



Managing a team is no easy feat. Managing a remote team can be even trickier, especially without the right tools. Trello is an easy-to-use web-based tool for managing projects that can be used for individual task management or project management for an entire team. It lets you assign tasks to individual team members or a group of team members, and it tracks deadlines. Trello's mobile app is simple to use, making it perfect for the remote worker on the go.



Remote work isn't exclusive to a single job title. If you're a designer or you work closely with a design team, InVision might be a good tool for your remote work. InVision takes the hassle out of building interactive prototypes and sharing them with your team.

The best part of InVision might be the commenting and feedback capability, though. When you share digital design mock-ups with your team, collecting feedback and iterating quickly is refreshingly simple.



Google Drive

Google Drive needs no introduction.

You don't want remote work to stifle your ability to store and share important documents. Google Drive gives you that and more. It lets you store and organize documents; collaborate with team members in real time regardless of geographic location; and share documents, spreadsheets, or presentations with whoever you choose.

Arguably the best part? You take your documents wherever you go because you can access your Google Drive account from anywhere.

The days of version control nightmares and searching your computer for a Word document to attach to an email are a thing of the past when you use Google Drive.

By Chad Reid www.jotform.com

7 free ways to promote employee wellbeing

The impact of coronavirus on employee wellbeing has been vast, from having to adapt to new processes overnight to being isolated from colleagues and normality.

However, the 'new normal' is encouraging positive change around employee satisfaction and talent retention. Forget beer fridges and office dogs, sometimes stripping things back to the core is the best way to inspire a workforce.

Offer work flexibility without question

If there's anything the pandemic has shown, it's that working from home can work. Everyone has a preference, but giving choice returns trust. Allowing employees to have a say in their terms is a sure-fire way to boost satisfaction.

A key consideration for HR is remote working policies. Is it something all levels can do? Does a formal request need to be raised? Many employees will provide 'reasonable' excuses – but are they necessary if there are no prior commitments? And that's not all. Other working policies, like medical leave and grievance, should be assessed for suitability.

Avoid indirectly encouraging overworking

Employees should never feel subconsciously guilted into working beyond their contracted hours. However, British workers complete around 10 hours of overtime on average each week. With correct management of workload and recruitment, no one should feel like they are stretched too thinly.

Emailing late at night and using work apps on personal phones isn't something that should be celebrated. Of course, this might sometimes be necessary, but it shouldn't be something that's an accepted norm.

This ties into how employees, especially



millennials, now move on when they are too stressed or receive low pay. It's essential to create an environment that puts employees first – as businesses are only as good as their staff after all.

Encourage a healthy work-life balance

As well as making the workplace a more positive space, the home office is now an important consideration. Working from home can be just as, if not more, productive than being at the office. However, the main drawback is the lack of separation between work and social life.

Some employees may feel more pressure to be productive while not under their manager's watchful eye. This attitude should be discouraged

by urging them to take regular breaks, finish on time, and close their laptop during lunch.

In the event that remote working appears to be less productive for some employees, this should be approached sensitively and with concern around wellbeing. The better employees' needs are accommodated, the more inclined they will be to stay with a business.

Provide payment accuracy and flexibility

It's time to go back to basics. Payroll legislation is changing all the time, from Minimum National Wage to statutory payments. Being paid the correct amount and on time is the bare minimum reward any employee should receive.

Incorrect payments are more common than expected, with a 2019 study showing that 76% of the employers surveyed had failed to pay their staff correctly or on time in the past year. Payroll software with automation features and compliance with legislation can help to reduce human error – and sometimes switching can save businesses money. Choosing the right payroll software is essential to get right.

Then there's consideration around flexible payments. The option to allow advance payment is a huge advantage that can relieve employees of stress around money; something that carries through to work motivation.

Create a safe space to share concerns

Employees may keep quiet about their concerns in fear of penalisation. However, honest feedback is the most valuable thing that HR teams can possess. Consider options like anonymous surveys with prompts around the work environment, management, and value. Making positive change based on negative feedback will reinforce trust in the workforce.

Just as employees should be open, so should HR and management. Known issues that need to be addressed should be vocalised, as this is a key opportunity to gain insight into common bugbears and potential solutions. A work policy that encourages openness is one where workers

aren't silenced into submission.

Some managers treat regular reviews like a box-ticking exercise, but it's essential to rethink them. With the right agenda, more meaningful topics can be uncovered, and any issues can be addressed.

Challenge the norms

We admit to ourselves that meetings can often be summarised in a 30-second email. So why continue to organise them? A new phenomenon propelled by COVID-19 is the reliance on video calls for short catch-ups that would have previously been informal calls.

The solution? Easy – cut the red tape and prioritise what's most efficient. If employees frequently complain about a standardised process, is it something that can be changed? Can it be done better, for example, by introducing new technology?

Ensure all people feel accommodated

It's 2020, yet the representation of issues surrounding gender, sexuality, and race is still lacking in the workplace. Some HR teams may use language that excludes employees without even realising it. HR teams should take the time to learn and understand issues that could impact employees – all staff should feel comfortable and encouraged to be themselves. This also includes assessing diversity within the workplace.

Moving forward

At a time when the importance of family and physical and mental health has become clearer than ever, we need to rethink how we work. The bells and whistles are no longer enough, and standard processes are being challenged to enable greater employee satisfaction.

Not only does focusing on the wellbeing of employees boost productivity and retention, but it also encourages new talent and business. It's the first place to start when it comes to setting a precedent for the future.

By Luke Thomas [hrnews.co.uk](https://www.hrnews.co.uk)

Best Zoom alternatives for video calling

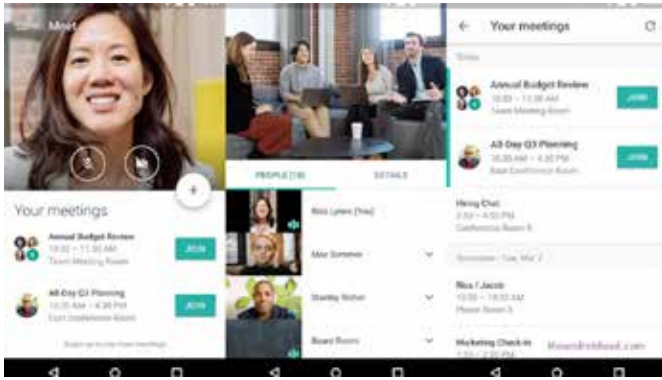
With the best Zoom alternatives, everyone can get all the video calling and conferencing features they need if they can't (or don't want to) use Zoom. Many video chat users look for alternatives to Zoom because of security and privacy concerns or because they simply want to try out something different.



Since the spring, millions of people have used Zoom, one of the best video chat apps and video calling software solutions during the pandemic. But Zoom privacy and security issues have led some users to seek out other apps.

In recent months, video calling services like Google Meet, Microsoft Teams and Skype have been adding new features and functionality to keep up with Zoom.

So, if you're looking for Zoom alternatives for your video conferencing needs, here are the top choices.



Google Meet (free and paid)

Google Meet is the most well-known and widely used Zoom alternative. Meet was previously only available to paying G-suite customers, but in these pandemic times, the company has added a free tier. You can hold video calls with up to 250 participants, hold presentations and record meetings and save them to Drive. You can also easily send a meeting link to participants outside of your company.

Google also recently added more Zoom-like features to Meet, like a grid view and backgrounds. And now Meet is integrated with Gmail, so you can start a video call right from the left column of your email browser window. Google has plans for further upgrades down the road, and is even adding custom backgrounds (Zoom's best feature) for its education customers.

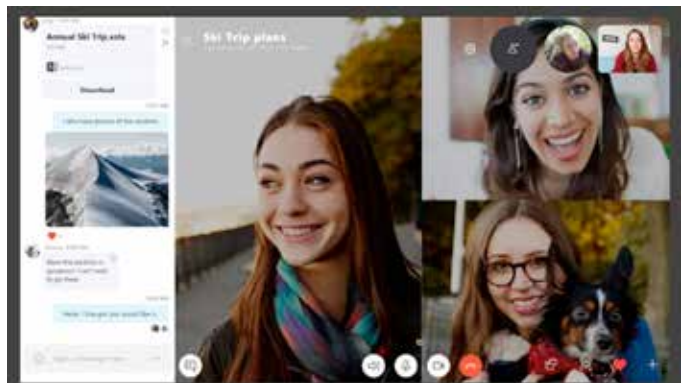


Microsoft Teams (paid and free)

Microsoft Teams allows paid users to host video meetings for up to 300 people. Unlike the Microsoft-owned Skype, Teams does offer standard video conferencing tools, like screen sharing and the ability to record meetings. Teams

is included with two different Office 365 plans, which also provide Office apps, 1 TB of OneDrive storage and more.

There's also a free version of Teams, though it comes with fewer features than the paid version. But you're in luck, since Microsoft rolled out a six-month free trial of paid plants to meet the high demand caused by the pandemic.



Skype (free)

The popular video chat software Skype is well-known and widely used, and its new Skype Meet Now feature is here to challenge Zoom. Meetings can hold up to 50 users, and users no longer need an account to sign in, just a link.

There is a text chat window, but otherwise, Skype doesn't have the meeting organization tools that the other Zoom alternatives have. But it's free and can be used on the web, Windows, Mac, iOS and Android.

Facebook Messenger Rooms (free)

Facebook is never one to cede digital territory, so it's beefing up its video chat options with Messenger Rooms. The new feature allows Facebook members to create public or private video chatrooms that can hold up to 50 people for an unlimited amount of time. By comparison, free Zoom calls can hold up to 100 participants for 40 minutes. In a very rare move, Facebook is allowing people without accounts to join a Messenger Room via a link.

Continued ►



Participants can use Facebook’s augmented reality filters, sort of like Snapchat filters. Other features can brighten dark rooms and touch up your appearance. Room calls are not end-to-end encrypted, but Facebook says it will not listen in on any calls. And room creators can remove participants at any time.



Discord (free)

If you want a free Zoom alternative, look into Discord. The communication app is popular with gamers, but can be used by anyone looking for encrypted chat, messaging and video calls. Users set up a dedicated “server,” which can be organized into rooms (similar to Slack) that host video and text-based chats.

Discord recently raised the limit for Go Live video calls from 10 users to 50. And the app is available on most web browsers, as well as Mac, Windows, Linux, iOS and Android.

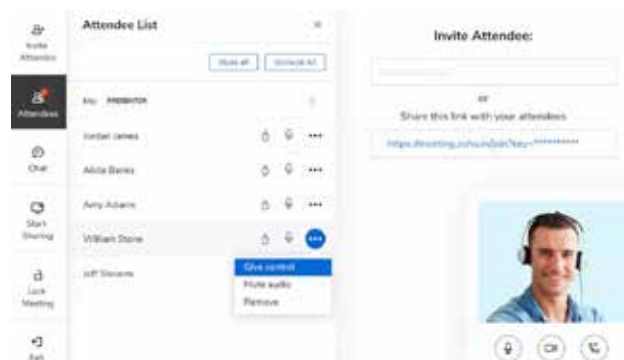
Zoho Meeting (paid)

The open-source video conferencing service allows you to host end-to-end encrypted



video meetings and calls for up to 100 people. Participants don’t need to sign up for a login; they can access the meetings through a link or a dial-in via web browsers, desktop clients or mobile apps. Zoho has even provided a handy chart comparing its product to Zoom.

Zoho Meeting offers an array of meeting tools, like screen sharing, the ability to record calls and moderation (you can mute participants, for example). And you can easily pull in documents, spreadsheets and presentations since the service is integrated with Zoho’s Office suite. But note that there’s a different pricing plan for webinars, which may make it too costly



GoTo Meeting (paid)

One of the first video conferencing services out there, GoToMeeting is a feature-packed Zoom alternative. The entry-level plan allows for 150 participants, while the enterprise plan can include up to 3,000.

GoToMeeting offers all the standard tools, like the ability to record meetings and share your screen. You can also have multiple meeting facilitators. And the service is accessible on web browsers, Mac, PC, Linux, iOS and Android.

Home workers rewarded with fresh coffee delivered to their door, courtesy of the boss

Almost 50% of the UK workforce are working from home. And remote working means less office perks, like decent coffee paid for by the boss, right? Wrong. A new workplace coffee scheme is here, thanks to maverickcoffee.co.uk. Any UK business can now offer their employees fresh coffee delivered right to their door.

This new innovative scheme enables employers to offer their employees the same perks and benefits they would have had in an office environment, but simply adapting it to the 'new norm' of home-working.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:

1. The employer chooses the best package to suit the size of their business and pays upfront for a set number of bags of coffee (think of it like a tab).
2. The whole team receives their instructions on how the scheme works and can order coffee as and when they need it, directly from our website. With nothing to pay!
3. The home workers await their freshly roasted coffee which will be delivered to their door within days. When they run out, they simply order another bag.

What are the benefits of using this scheme?

- 10% discount off RRP
- It's a fantastic office perk for staff
- Employees feel appreciated
- The team get freshly roasted 'proper' coffee
- Caffeine is proven to increase productivity

- No tie-ins or contracts
- Free UK delivery
- A report at the end of each period so the company can see how popular the scheme has been and who has used it.

The company will soon be adding a range of luxury tea to our offering so this scheme will appeal to both coffee and tea drinkers.

More Information:

maverickcoffee.co.uk/pages/coffee-for-offices



Initiative sees employees walk 42.5 million steps in six weeks

UK employees separated during the pandemic have found an alternative way to reconnect and enhance their wellbeing according to data collated by HR, health, and wellbeing firm Everyday Juice Limited.

In a step challenge initiated by the Leeds-based firm, UK employees joined forces to compete, walking an average of 9,358 steps each per day.

Between 1 September and 11 October, a total of just under 42.5 million steps were recorded by 29 teams.

That's almost all the way around the world – it has been suggested it takes just 43,252,500 steps to walk around the world right on the equator.

Prior to lockdown, the NHS claimed that British people walked between 3000 and 4000 steps in a day.

The data from Everyday Juice Ltd's **StrollwithIT** challenge revealed the lockdown average amongst the 106 participating UK employees is almost three times this amount, suggesting activity levels have increased as people continue to work remotely.

One participant from Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust reported feeling more connected to her colleagues by completing the challenge:

"StrollwithIT motivated us, gave us a shared sense of purpose, and a reason to get out and about. It prompted us to have a couple of 'walking' meetings which my colleagues really appreciated."

Another participant from Leeds Trinity University said: "I'm so glad we took part. It got a bit of conversation going about activity and movement within our team and definitely encouraged more of us to up our step count."

EJL's 'StrollwithIT' challenge was launched in August 2020 in a bid to reconnect employees and enhance wellbeing amongst teams who continue to work remotely.

Participants were asked to form teams of up to no more than five and enter each team member's steps every week. These teams were placed into leagues dependent on their size and those that finished with the highest number of steps were crowned league winners.

Twenty-nine teams made up of 106 employees from across the UK registered to take part in the step challenge.

- **42,262,969 steps taken in six weeks**
- **Average number of steps per person three times the amount recorded by NHS**
- **Participants report sense of shared purpose from team walking**
- **75% of participants were female**

- **58% of the total number of steps were completed by five-person teams.**
- **29% were completed by four person teams, 6% three person teams, and 4% two person teams.**
- **Of the 106 participants, 75% were female – 86% of these were team captains.**





Gary Butterfield, co-founder and executive director at Everyday Juice Ltd said: "The pandemic has forced many of us to work from home, blurring the lines between the workplace and the place where we tend to relax.

"Walking is one of the most accessible exercises that we can do, and offers us a fantastic opportunity to keep active, improve our mental and physical health, whilst also reconnecting with others.

"I developed 'StrollwithIT' as I knew it was a simple way to bring disconnected colleagues together, giving them a reason to collectively work toward a common goal outside of their day-to-day tasks.

"I'm absolutely delighted by the results and

the feedback we've had. So much so that I'm planning to launch further challenges in the new year."

Everyday Juice Limited was co-founded in 2015 after a successful launch of its wellbeing platform Juice to 8,200 University of Sheffield employees, as part of a three-year internal initiative.

Experts in HR, they believe that everyone has the right to be healthy and happy at work, connected to a community of people who want to make a positive impact on themselves in the workplace.

In January 2021, the firm will reveal details of the next StrollwithIT challenge ahead of national walking month.

www.juicelimited.co.uk.



Top 10 working from home lunches

Spice up your lunch while working from home with these easy recipes compiled by BBC Good Food. Made from storecupboard essentials, these simple recipes require minimal ingredients like chopped tomatoes, canned veggies, beans and pulses. These lunch ideas are super speedy and nutritious, giving you the energy you need to power through the day.



Vegetarian chilli

Raid the storecupboard for our easiest-ever vegetarian chilli with just four ingredients. Cook a pack of oven-roasted vegetables in a casserole dish for 15 minutes. Add a can of kidney beans in chilli sauce and a can of chopped tomatoes and cook for another 10-15 minutes. Heat up a ready-to-eat mixed grain pouch and you've got a satisfying lunch in no time.



Quick chicken hummus bowl

Toss some fresh ingredients together for this healthy, no-cook quick chicken hummus bowl. Combine hummus with lemon juice, zest and a drizzle of water for a simple dressing. Then separate a grain pouch into two bowls and top with avocado, chopped spinach, sliced chicken breast, pomegranate seeds, red onion and almonds.



Creamy pesto & kale pasta

Make a big batch of this simple creamy pesto & kale pasta with just a handful of ingredients and storecupboard staples. To make this healthy, veggie pasta, combine wholemeal penne or mafalda with leafy kale and fried red onion. Then toss in a creamy sauce made with reduced-fat soft cheese and a jar of pesto.

Lentil soup

Whip up a big batch of this easy lentil soup to get you through the week. This budget-friendly dish is a great way to use up stock cubes or fresh vegetable stock. Combine with red lentils, chopped carrots and sliced leeks. Simmer for up to an hour until the lentils break down, scatter over some parsley and serve with buttered bread.



Mexican penne with avocado

Pack in all of your five-a-day with this thrifty Mexican penne with avocado. This healthy, vegetarian dish is low in calories and fat and rich in iron, fibre and vitamin C. Make use of storecupboard essentials like chopped tomatoes, canned sweetcorn and vegetable bouillon powder. This super filling pasta is topped off with chunky avocado, a squeeze of lime juice and a handful of chopped coriander.



Gluten-free storecupboard fishcakes

Freeze a batch of these gluten-free storecupboard fishcakes to have on hand for an easy lunch. Combine tinned tuna with mashed potato, an egg, lemon juice and fresh chives. Shape into fishcakes and fry in oil for three minutes on each side. Mix gluten-free mayonnaise with some chopped spring onions for a tasty topping.



Vegan chickpea curry jacket potatoes

Take your average jacket potato to the next level with these vegan chickpea curry jacket potatoes. Make a flavourful filling with tikka masala paste and cans of chickpeas and chopped tomatoes. It's gently spiced with turmeric, ground coriander, garam masala, chopped green chilli and finely grated ginger. Spoon the filling over an oven-roasted sweet potato and scatter with coriander.



Continued ►

Super-quick sesame ramen

Make the most of instant noodles with super-quick sesame ramen. Cook the noodles with the seasoning sachet and add pak choi and spring onion for the final minute. Top with a boiled egg, a scattering of toasted sesame seeds and chilli sauce. This healthy dish is low in fat and calories and comes together in 15 minutes.



Veggie-loaded flatbread

Use up storecupboard staples like canned chickpeas and jarred olives with this veggie-loaded flatbread. To make this easy lunch for one, combine crushed chickpeas with tahini and lemon juice. Warm up a shop-bought flatbread, and top with the chickpea mixture, grilled onions and cherry tomatoes. Add olives, crumbled feta, shredded basil and a drizzle of olive oil.



Satay chicken rice bowl

This satay chicken rice bowl is a super filling midweek lunch. Use up a jar of smooth peanut butter by mixing with sesame oil and soy sauce. Use half the mixture to marinate boneless chicken breasts or thighs, then grill for 15 minutes. Slice the chicken and serve with Thai sticky rice, pickled cucumber and extra sauce.



Storecupboard tuna bean salad

Being short on fresh ingredients doesn't mean you can't enjoy a nutritious salad. This speedy, low in fat storecupboard tuna bean salad uses food you might have already, such as tinned cannellini beans and tuna, onions, garlic and potatoes. Finish it off with a bag of fresh salad leaves or any other greens you have in the fridge.



bbcgoodfood.com

Two thirds of employees don't believe working from home full time makes them more productive

Almost a third of office workers, 29%, have already returned to their offices, but workplace experts cannot agree whether a full-time return to work is best for UK business productivity. Workers agree.

While nearly two thirds of employees, 63%, don't believe they're more productive working from home full time, nearly half, 45%, believe they are equally productive working from home or the office.

The figures from a recent survey of 189 office-based workers carried out by UK-based office software experts, SmartWay2, also showed when working from home only 36% of office workers felt they were more productive. Around half this number, 19%, felt more productive in the office, perhaps reflecting the psychological impact of missing the sociability that the office provides.

The ideal solution seems to be a blend. Just under half of those polled, 45%, say their productivity is the same regardless of where they work and 91% of people expressed a desire to split their time between home and the office.

Steve Vatidis, Executive Chairman of SmartWay2 commented: "Despite COVID disruption, workers are learning how to return to their offices. But like the ever-changing lockdown measures, these results show there is no simple 'one size fits all' solution. Employers are under pressure to grant greater autonomy to their workforce. But they still have a lot of work to do to convince their teams of the productivity benefits offered by showing up at modern workplaces which are COVID-safe."

Looking further out, nearly one in five, 18%, also expect employees in their organisation to return to offices by autumn 2021. However,

with the current uncertainty and a Second Wave underway, office flexibility will be key for employers looking to maximise productivity from their workforce, geographically distributed forcibly or out of choice, as the situation changes.

Vatidis concludes: "Organisations that can provide a COVID-safe working environment, combined with flexibility of scheduling for when workers come into the office, will be at a distinct advantage for managing the upcoming period of change. Employers need to be able to communicate regularly with employees and provide reassurance on safety measures and flexible working arrangements to make them feel comfortable with the environment."

TABLE OF RESPONSES

How do you feel about your productivity when working from home?

I am more productive working from home 36%
I am more productive working from the office 19%
My productivity is the same whether at home or in the office 45%

When do you think employees in your organization will return to the workplace?

We have already returned to work 29%
Within 6 months 45%
Within 12 months 18%
Within 18 months 6%
24+ months 2%

Top 15 Virtual Christmas Parties

There's no doubt that the shape of company Christmas parties will be a little bit different this year. With a turbulent year hopefully behind us all, Christmas is the perfect opportunity to do something fun, entertaining and engaging for staff. Done right it can be the ideal time to thank staff, wrap up a challenging year, put work to one side, say thank you, and just have some good old fashioned fun!



GoTo Events (www.gotoevents.co.uk) have picked their top 10 virtual Christmas party ideas to help get the festive spirit under way for 2020.

How do virtual Christmas parties work?

GoTo Events have taken their most popular conventional Christmas events and adapted them to be run in a safe virtual environment. People from all over the world can come together, take part and enjoy themselves without the fear of social distancing rules.

All events are hosted by a fun, upbeat compere, who will run the show, keep everyone entertained and engaged, and make the entire experience slick, upbeat and engaging.

What if my team are Zoomed Out?

We know the feeling... After nearly a year of video rather than face to face contact, the last thing people want is 'another Zoom meeting'. To combat this all our virtual Christmas parties involve huge levels of participation. A lot of them also include surprise packs that everyone receives in the post. Each experience is very different to a normal Zoom session. You'll notice the difference as soon as you login!

Top 15 Virtual Christmas Party Ideas

1. Festive Chocolate Making

A virtual Christmas party that's a real treat for the taste buds. Hosted by our master chocolatier, we'll take you through the amazing journey of how chocolate goes from bean to bar. It's then hands on with the ingredients as everyone designs creates & brands their very own unique box of Christmas themed chocolate delights. The event also includes the option of individuals receiving a custom pack with all ingredients, equipment and a surprise gift in the post in advance of your event.

For full details of all virtual parties go to:
www.gotoevents.co.uk



2. Christmas Cocktails & Dreams

Become the ultimate party host as you learn some very cool tricks & skills to mix a range of delicious great looking famous cocktails. Hosted from our virtual bar our mixologists give you an amazing demonstration of bar skills before we kick in to a range of fun rounds where everyone will learn how to mix famous cocktails such as Mojitos & Sex on the Beach. The final round hots up with a competition to see who can come up with their own award winning drink. This event also includes the option of a full cocktail kit including all required mixers, drinks, fresh fruits & glassware being posted to everyone in advance.

3. Christmas Virtual Murder Mystery

Who dunnit? That's the ultimate question! We run two versions of our festive Murder Mystery events. One using a high tech Cluedo style app based game, the other with live virtual actors. Each experience tasks teams with the challenge of solving all kinds of clues, examining evidence & hunting for suspects to unravel the crime. Players work in mini teams to share ideas and information to try and work out who was the murderer, what was the murder weapon and what was the motive.

Continued ►

4. The Great Escape Room

A virtual Christmas event using the latest app based technology & amazing augmented reality. Teams go head to head in our virtual arena to battle it out to find hidden clues, complete puzzles, hunt for mystery information and unravel brain busting conundrums. The clocks ticking, the pressures on & the games masters watching. Who will be the first to successfully escape the room and take the win...?



5. Time for Wine

Especially popular at Christmas time, our wine themed virtual Christmas party is a favourite for a lot of companies. Hosted by a professional wine expert, we'll take you on a journey of taste and aroma with wines from around the world. In advance everyone receives a pack containing all the tasting materials and an amazing selection of different vintage wines. As well as being great fun & educational, this event is a great way to virtually socialise and enjoy a glass or two!

6. Festive Chef

There's no better time to learn some amazing skills, and no better person to teach you than our Michelin Star Chef! We have a variety of cooking options from Christmas themed dishes, the great Bakeathon, 2-3 course meals, sushi making & even the stunning Molecular Gastronomy. We either send individuals a list of ingredients or



why not let us send them a lovely pack of food, goodies and a mystery gift with everything they need for this amazing virtual cooking experience.

7. Virtual Horse Racing

Get ready for some serious fun and excitement as we bring all the thrills of horse racing direct to your screen. In a fun team head to head competition, players study the forms of each runner for each race before deciding how much fun money they want to bet and on which runner. Our live bookie will then take all bets before each amazing race is run. All races are taken from real events at real stadiums, so this is as close as you can get to the real thing!



8. Gameshow Bonanza

We've taken everything you know from the most famous game shows and mixed them into one fast paced, action packed, fully interactive, comedic hosted experience. In virtual teams, everyone goes head to head in a variety of hilarious rounds that promise to offer something for everyone. Laughter is guaranteed, and be warned, this is no ordinary quiz!

9. Task The Master

One of our favourite events for all year round, but even more fun with our festive twist. Inspired by the famous Task Master TV show, we bring this side splitting event to life, complete with a professional comedic host playing the role of the master. Everyone receives in advance a game pack with everything they need to play. Teams then go head to head in fun competition to try and crack a range of absolutely crazy challenges.



10. Deal or Not Real

Another TV inspired experience taken from the famous Deal or No Deal game show. Teams take part in a range of fun tasks and energizers in advance to win funds. They then enter the nail biting series of rounds against the banker to see which team has the nerves of steel to win the most money and take the win.



11. Festive Frenzy

Festive frenzy is one of our latest Christmas themed experiences. Loaded with all kinds of fun tasks games and challenges, festive frenzy is a great experience to create a real social scene for your 2020 virtual party.

Themed rounds include:

- **Festive brain busters**
- **Individual and Team photo and video challenges**
- **Collaborative challenges where you all come together at various points throughout the game to compete en masse**
- **Singing and laughter!**
- **Grand finale to crown your winning team**

12. Musical Bingo

Like bingo? Like music? Then this could be for you. Musical Bingo is a pure fun fast paced version of normal bingo, but with music instead on numbers. It works well for Virtual Christmas parties where a pure social fun, relaxed experience is required.

Hosted by our professional comperes, we welcome everyone to the game, and explain the simple rules of play. Everyone receives a musical

Continued ►

bingo card listing all the different songs and artists. We then pump up the wheels of steel as we flow through all kinds of music tracks from different genres and decades.

Recognise the song? Strike it off, and keep your ears peeled for the next tune! Just like normal bingo, there's winners for two lines, three lines and of course the full house. This is a virtual Christmas party activity that will always bring fun laughter and energy to the table.



13. Virtual Charity Skateboard Build

If you're looking for an virtual event that offers a heart-warming feel good factor, then our charity concept is ideal. The premise behind this experience is to benefit underprivileged children this Christmas. For some kids out there, Christmas isn't the happy time we all know and love. This virtual experience enables you to give to an amazing cause and bring the magic of Christmas to lives of people who need it most.

In advance everyone receives a pack containing a kit to build a full size skateboard, art materials, tools, stencils and instructions. Guided by our live virtual hosts and artists everyone builds and decorates their very own unique skateboard. We then arrange for couriers to collect the finished items where they return to us for safety checks before they are wrapped and delivered to the designated charity.

14. House Party

Sit back, crack open a beer, pour a glass of wine and be prepared to have the most fun possible from a virtual Christmas party. In advance everyone receives a game pack in the post containing everything they need to play. Items are as random as a toilet roll, Sellotape, a small Tupperware box, dice and a lolly stick. They all have a roll to play!

As soon as you log in, our lively host welcomes you to the fun and explains the rules. Teams now go head to head on a range of hilarious challenges that will literally have you in stitches of laughter to watch and play. Imagine Celebrity Juice mixed with The Generation Game and you have House Party!

15. I'm Working From Home Get Me Outta Here!

Inspired by popular tv shows, this is our Christmas take on a jungle themed challenge where's it's your chance to pit yourselves against the celebrities and see if you've got what it takes to be crowned the kings and queens of the virtual office.

Another virtual Christmas event where teams receive packs in the post with everything they need to play. As soon as teams log in they're thrust into a series of themed rounds in fun competition. One of our favourites for this event is 'nominate'. If your team wins the jackpot, they get the chance to nominate a player from a competing team. Everyone receives edible critters in their posted packs. You can guess what comes next!

