

# Dealing With Time Wasters In Business

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One of the big downsides of working from home is that you are surrounded by the familiar. You have probably spent a lot of time convincing people that what you do is a real job, but when you are sitting there at home you may find that you are the one who is not taking the job seriously enough. Everyone's home is their castle, and the castle is set up just as much for recreation as it is for functional work. There are tons of ways for people to waste their time just by doing what they would usually do on a day off. Here is a list of ways in which the work-from-home entrepreneur could likely lose a lot of valuable business hours.

## The Phone

It is likely that you never realized how much the phone rang until you are in the middle of an important work project. Even short telephone diversions that are not related to work can have an incredibly detrimental effect on your work day.

How you minimize its impact on your work day will depend on who is phoning you. If it is a customer or a client, make sure that their needs and questions are clear and that you are not distracted by personal "war stories" or long drawn out complaints.

Family should be made aware that you cannot answer the phone during certain times of the day unless it is an emergency. Most home businesses will have separate lines to ensure that they do not receive a lot of personal calls when they are working. Make sure not to give in to the temptation to pick up once you hear who is talking on the answering machine; call them back when your work is done.

No matter how you hide your line number, it seems inevitable that you will receive calls from telemarketers. Most of us are inclined to politeness; don't be. Hang up the phone immediately. They will never call you back and if you try to excuse yourself, they are trained to keep you talking.

## Disorganized Or Inconveniently Located Work Space

This is probably the number one area where those who work from home can waste a lot of time. Work spaces that are located in a high traffic area or in large rooms that include multiple potential distractions are a terrible idea, because the opportunities to get sidetracked are infinite.

Insufficient desk space and filing systems are another area in which a lot of time can get lost. You don't want to be digging through the pile of paper on your desk in order to locate important receipts or documents. Some people may find they have so much paper that they can't really get access to their phone or fax machine! Not having your workspace well organized will also mean wasted minutes when you have to get a new stack of printer paper or ink.

## Shoddy Inventory

Think of it. You go to get some paper for your printer, and realize that you are completely out. Instead of a five minute procedure, you are now going to have to spend a part of the time when you thought you would be producing just assembling the materials you need to be productive. Some people will find that they get back with the paper only to realize that they are also out of staples and their pens are out of ink. Inventory recovery is an important area that a lot of people forget about.

## Distractions

There are a lot of distractions that can present themselves in the home work environment. Family is constantly in and out, wanting to visit or asking you to do something. It might be a beautiful day outside and you decide that you are just going to take a few minutes to go out and tend to your garden; a lot of the time this will lead to another task that you realize needs to be done, and then another and another. Pretty soon, the day is gone and you have not done nearly the amount of work you needed to.

A lot of home workers will find that the television is a terrible distraction. Night owls have the disadvantage of being at their most productive when the best shows are on the television, including a lot of major sporting events. A lot of us have no idea how much time is spent in front of the TV until all of the shows are over.

Another big distraction for the home entrepreneur is the Internet. There are thousands of sites on the Internet to be visited, and when you are working on the Internet from home you might hear them literally screaming your name. Talking in a chat room or on a message board is much more appealing than finishing that boring assignment, and just one more second quickly turns into where did the time go?!

Other businesses. You can waste a lot of time in dealing with other businesses when you are working from home. You might need to check the progress of a package or set up an account with a delivery company and end up spending a lot of time on hold or explaining your needs to a phone operator.

## Other Businesses

Even while working from home, you will find that you are inextricably linked to other businesses. These businesses are concerned about their own time, and not yours, and will often drain minutes or hours away from your schedule. It is important that you let them know (politely!) that your time is very important and you cannot afford to be put on hold or to spend a lot of time giving out all of your information again and again.

If you are contacting a business due to technical problems, make sure to give the details of the problem right away, before you disclose anything else. Make sure that you are talking to a person who can help you, and not some poor employee in a call centre who has no idea about the business details. If the problem has been recurring, ask to speak to a manager right away instead of waiting for twenty minutes while the employee decides that it is beyond their realm of expertise. If you are calling a business in regards to a service plan, such as the Internet, and you are put on hold for a long time, be prepared to switch to another provider.

Sometimes you will have to deal with your computer or other piece of technology going down. Make sure that you have a back up plan and again, let the people doing the repair know that you rely on this equipment to run your home business. Get a solid estimate on when you can expect the repairs to be completed, and have a contingency plan, such as borrowing or renting another machine, in place in case the repairs take a while. If no solid estimate is given, take your business elsewhere.

## Small Details

Every business has an infinite amount of small details that are incredibly important to deal with but if

handled incorrectly will take up a disproportionate amount of time. Most of these small details should be handled in bulk; that is, look at your emails at the beginning of your work day and at the end, and reply to them at those times as well. Don't spend minutes every day checking to see if you received any new ones; this can add up to a lot of unproductive time.

The same thing goes for phone messages; plan a chunk of your day for listening and response, and then do not worry about them until the same time the next day. If you get a lot of work by bidding online or off, then incorporate a time in the day to look for projects and place bids or applications; having a specific time and amount of time budgeted will mean that you do not waste time on projects that you are not suited to.