

7 signs it's time to move out of the home office



Over half of small businesses in the US are home-based: both Apple and Ford began that way. It's a great way to cut down on expenses, especially when you're just starting out - and the commute is unbeatable! However, many (not necessarily all) successful companies will start to outgrow a home office over time.

Moving out of the basement or garage, or spare bedroom, or pile of papers at the kitchen table is a big, expensive step, and not to be taken lightly. Keep an eye out for the signs below - if many of them are affecting your work and/or your home life, you may be ready for that big step.

1. You're missing out on tax incentives

Although there are tax deductions available for your home and utilities, depending on your location you may actually be entitled to more tax savings if you have a separate office space.

Speak to your tax advisor about your current and potential circumstances - a 'better-off' tax calculation should be a big part of deciding whether your business should stay or go.

2. You need space for (more) employees

Your business is growing - that's great! And you've realized you need staff - that's even better! But where are you going to *put* them?

Unless you're hiring family members, potential employees may feel uncomfortable working in your home - and you may also be uncomfortable having them there, particularly if they're going to be working while you're elsewhere. Even if you can overcome these obstacles, don't forget about employment law, insurance and/or local zoning regulations for businesses with employees.

A short-term solution may be to outsource work to freelancers working elsewhere, or to hire a 'virtual assistant' - but if you need staff on-site every day, only an external office space will do.



3. ...and customers

In 'Better Call Saul', the eponymous lawyer works out of the back of a nail salon. When he wants to meet a couple of prospective clients, he takes them to a coffee shop - and explains this away by insisting that 'our office is being painted, and the fumes are quite horrid'. Why the lie?

Because if you don't have a presentable office in which to meet clients or customers, you can't inspire confidence in yourself as a well-established professional.

Don't lie to your customers! Instead, look for external office space if you feel like you've outgrown the coffee-shop.

4. Your home life is taking over your work

Working from home can be a great way to balance work and family. It takes a lot of multitasking, but when the system works, those hours when the kids are at school or the baby is napping can be the most productive of your life.

However, you need to be alert to the system breaking down. If you find that your family is beginning to leave you with all the daytime chores or errands because 'you're home all day'; if you're constantly being interrupted; if it's just too noisy to think - something needs to change.

It might be that you and your family simply need to establish boundaries over your time and space. But if you want to guarantee that your mind is on work and not on domestic duties, then the most effective way is to get out of the house.

5. Your work life is taking over your home

Has your paperwork spread from your office area? Do you find files in your bathroom, or important mail in the silverware drawer?

Are the products you make beginning to take up more space? Are you parking on the street because your garage is packed with boxes? Is it a struggle to keep your manufacturing space clear and clean?

Or is it your time that's getting cluttered with work? Have you found yourself answering emails during a family mealtime, or an important phone call when you would rather have been reading a story to your toddler?

If you feel like you're always at work, it's going to take a toll on your health over time. Moving out into an external office space will give you both the physical space to work effectively and the emotional space to divide your work life from your family and/or leisure time.



6. You're feeling isolated or unmotivated

When you're the only person in the office every day, with no-one to chat to even when you break for coffee, the hours can drag - and the novelty of working without pants on soon wears off.

Studies have shown that many people work more productively and more happily in the company of others. Moving into a shared working space, even if it's just a co-working office with other small business owners, can help you feel like part of the workforce again and encourage you to work harder, better and faster (and in pants).

7. You want to be visible and present in your community

You probably have a great online presence - but depending on the nature of your business, you could still be missing out on customers if you don't have a physical shop-front. What's more, there may be networking opportunities in your town or city that you could benefit from if you were simply closer to them.

Renting a physical office space in your community will support your local economy, keep your business in the public eye, and put new opportunities your way.

Conduct regular assessments of your workspace, your working habits, and your own well being. If you recognise one - or a few - of the signs above, it means you have a great opportunity to improve your business and help it grow. Consider the pros and cons of staying at home versus moving into an office and you'll know when it's time to take that big step.