

“IT” Makes Sense

The Sense Appeal of a Home Office

Initially, working remotely seemed like it might be a short-term event; however, many businesses and organizations are slowly returning to the office over many months and in some cases, not at all. As a result, it is important to setup a work-friendly space at home that appeals to your senses, keeping you productive and comfortable. At IT Radix, we support many clients that routinely work remotely in addition to ourselves. Here are some tips to work effectively as well as help reduce distractions and stay on task while you work remotely.

Set up a work-friendly space

Have an appropriate worksurface that can accommodate your computer or laptop, a second monitor, and a keyboard and mouse. Use a comfortable chair. Take the time to review your ergonomics to avoid “cricks” in your neck for typing with your shoulders up by your ears. If possible, get a standing desk or make one to avoid sitting all day—it’s healthier and standing can help you focus. Use a surge protector or small uninterruptible power supply (UPS) to ensure that your computer technology is protected from power dips and surges in your home. Velcro cable ties or twist ties are your friend—spend a few moments organizing your cables so that you don’t inadvertently get caught up in them and your desk doesn’t end up looking like a spaghetti dinner of cables. A small USB charging hub makes it easy to keep multiple devices charged throughout the day and can be mounted under your desk using Velcro or Command strips to save space and keep things tidy and out of sight.

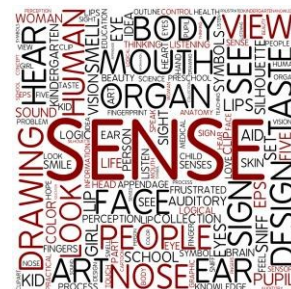
Cut the noise

To minimize the distractions of pets or family members as well as electronic temptations such as the TV, set up your work office in the quietest part of your home. Hang a “Do Not Disturb” sign on your office door while you are working. Use background noise to help you focus. Check out apps such as Focus@Will or BrainWave which combine music or white noise with binaural tones or frequencies to help improve focus and drown out outside distractions.

Video conference like a pro

Have good lighting so that the participants can clearly see you instead of being backlit like someone in the witness protection program. If you don’t have a place for an appropriate lamp, get a small USB-powered light that could be used with your laptop. Be mindful of what is behind you while you’re on a video call. If necessary, purchase a portable green screen that can attach to your chair to screen your background. Use a headset with a microphone to improve sound quality and reduce the amount of background noise that you transmit. The headset can be used for both online meetings as well as your VoIP telephone.

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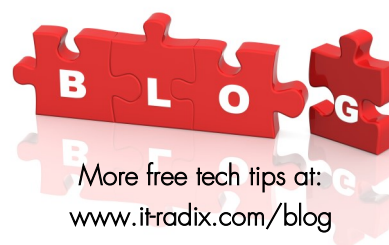
Noteworthy

Since working from home, employees say they...

- Conducted more video calls than usual (44%)
- Conducted more phone calls than usual (38%)
- Attended a virtual event (37%)
- Found a new appreciation for certain technologies (34%)
- Used technologies for the first time (31%)

Stats taken from Salesforce Research—WFH activities

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Sense Appeal

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Clear clutter from your desk

Have a place for papers that you might need to reference while on your computer and those that need to be filed. A small wireless multi-function printer/scanner can be a godsend in helping tame the paper and ease sharing information with colleagues who are remote. Simply scan the items and store electronically where you can easily access it both in the office or working remote. While it is tempting to purchase inexpensive inkjet printers, over the long term, laser printing is usually more cost effective and the toner cartridges do not dry out if used infrequently.

Take time for breaks

Have a visible clock to ensure that you take mental breaks throughout your workday. Many productivity gurus recommend working in 20- to 30-minute sprints with a small break to help maintain focus and productivity. There are a variety of apps that can help you track your time as well as remind you to take breaks such as RescueTime, Time Timer, SelfControl and more.

Need help making sense of the various tools to make working remotely a success, give us a call today!

Monitor Settings that Reduce Eyestrain

Eyestrain has become a major issue in today's world. With blue light coming from our cell phones, tablets, televisions and computers, it is no wonder that more people than ever are suffering from eyestrain, headaches, and dry eyes. However, there are a few things that can be done that will help keep you comfortable and your eyes in good shape.

First things first: upgrade your monitor! To reduce eyestrain as much as possible, it is recommended to upgrade to a flat-panel LED screen with an anti-reflective surface. Old CRT monitors had a "flicker" that was known to be a major cause of eyestrain. Luckily, today's new LED screens do not have this issue. Large screen monitors, 19 inches or more, are also recommended to make it easier on your eyes. Here are additional monitor settings that can help:

1. **Adjust the brightness of your screen.** Generally, your screen should not be brighter or darker than your surroundings. Rule of thumb: if it looks like a light source, it's too bright.
2. **Change the color temperature.** Blue light causes more eyestrain than orange or red hues, so by reducing the color temperature of your screen you are reducing the amount of blue light coming through. This allows you to look at your screen for a longer amount of time comfortably.
3. **Adjust the text size.** Some people find it easier to read on a bright screen when the text is bigger. Your eyes do not have to focus as hard and thus removes the headache that follows suit.

Next, modify the contrast of your applications. Many apps, browsers, software, and even websites have a "dark mode" that is easier on the eyes. "Dark mode" allows the background of your screen to be black and the text white. This puts less strain on the eyes and makes your screen easier to stare at all day. Here are a few examples of apps with dark mode to get you started: Gmail, Chrome, Apple iPhone, and all Microsoft Office applications (Word, Outlook, etc.).

Finally, use a matte screen filter or "anti-glare" screen protector. Matte coatings filter out the glare that you may get on a computer screen from both natural light and light bulbs. The effect is one that it makes your screen look flatter, as if you were looking at a sheet of translucent paper.

Reach out to IT Radix for help updating your settings today!



Our Clients Speak Out!

"The IT Radix staff has seamlessly transitioned to remote work without missing a beat for us!"

Susan Capurso, Executive Assistant — RENEW International

Located in Plainfield, RENEW International fosters spiritual renewal in the Catholic tradition by empowering individuals and communities to encounter God in everyday life, deepen and share faith, and connect faith with action.

Fun with Bricks



Anyone who has ever stepped on a LEGO barefoot will never forget the excruciating pain that ensued. But LEGO bricks are also a great source of comfort for the young and old alike. So much so, that LEGO started targeting their marketing efforts to stressed-out adults!

One of the world's largest toymakers is pitching its bricks as a form of mindfulness, and adults are happy to play along! In a recent ad, LEGO claimed that "Building with LEGO bricks reduces stress and improves your well-being. It's Zen, in the shape of a brick." Focusing on a single task is a form of mindfulness. In fact, any repetitive activity can help strike the right balance between mental engagement and relaxation.

LEGO Architecture and city skyline sets are particularly appealing to adults. In 2019, the LEGO FORMA pilot project was launched focusing on movable fish with replaceable skins that targeted adult audiences.

So, take some time out for some mindless fun and nurture your creative side today. Just watch where you step!

~~MORE~~
~~LESS~~ is MORE

When it comes to videoconferencing, more is more...

Video calling on Teams currently has a 3x3 grid for viewing nine participants simultaneously, up from the original maximum of four. However, the future is looking even brighter as Teams recently announced that they will soon expand to 49 viewable participants (timeframe TBD).

IT Radix is a Microsoft Partner and a Teams expert and available to make IT work for you!

Let There NOT be "Blue" Light

When we think of cutting-edge technology, we tend to think of fancy new computers or smarter personal devices. We live in a hyper-connected world that requires a lot of "screen time." Whether that's signing in for a day's work or catching up with family over a FaceTime call, we spend a lot of our time staring at our screens. Research suggests this can lead to headaches, eyestrain, dizziness, fatigue, and even insomnia.

These unpleasant screen-time side effects are caused by Blue Light. Blue Light is a special type of light that screens omit to make them easy to see and convenient to use. This can lead to digital eyestrain—especially with bright, high contrast monitors. Thankfully, better technology doesn't stop with computing; and companies are now producing special glasses with Blue Light filtering lenses.

The lenses seek to cut down on some of the negative side effects modern life has on the eyes, and new research is supporting the findings. Blue Light glasses come in all sorts of shapes and frames to meet your needs and match your style. From reading glasses to coated prescription lenses, Blue Light glasses aim to reduce the digital eyestrain we sometimes experience from too much unprotected screen time. In some cases, your insurance may even cover the cost of them.

Blue Light glasses were developed in recent years to combat digital eye strain, and both consumer and scientific reports give them high remarks. Cutting down the intensity of Blue Light from our various devices is one simple way to protect our eyes and improve our quality of life. Some members of our team are enjoying the benefits.

Want to learn more about innovative technologies and burgeoning solutions? Let IT Radix shine a light on it!



"Hounds used to find things using their sense of smell, but now I use a search tool called Google Nose!"



From the desk of Cathy Coloff

Cathy

As COVID-19 continues to impact all of us at work and at home, I'm grateful to be in the "technology business." It has allowed us to help our clients continue to work despite the challenges brought by the Stay-At-Home Order and more. In our own small way, we've been able to help keep our economy going by helping our clients work. I've been impressed with the creative application of technology for everything from individual musical performances melded together into incredible harmonies to 3D printing of face shields to protect essential workers.

If COVID-19 wasn't enough, the racial violence in our country is disheartening. Sadly, racism and discrimination of all types exist on all levels in our country and I, for one, am pleased to see people everywhere acknowledging the issues and moving towards more fair, just and inclusive actions. Perhaps technology can help in our country's quest to peacefully end racism and discrimination of all types. A wealth of resources is already accessible through the Internet, but I wonder what new and creative uses of technology will be developed to help end discrimination.

In celebration of Juneteenth, I shared with our team an enlightening TED Talk called "Get comfortable with being uncomfortable." From COVID-19 to the racial unrest, things certainly are not comfortable; but as we continue to progress, I look forward to a new and better world for all.

SPECIAL OFFER

Book a meeting* with IT Radix during the months of **July, August and September** to learn how to turn your home quarters into your new HQ and receive a free Work-From-Home Starter Kit—from cookies to cozy slippers.

"The quieter you become,
the more you can hear."

— Rumi

Enter and Win Trivia Contest

The first person to send an email to resource@it-radix.com with the correct answer to our trivia question will win a WFH Starter Kit.

Q: Which of the five senses is the first to develop in humans?

April Trivia Challenge

Q: Of all Benjamin Franklin's inventions, which one gave him the greatest personal satisfaction?
(Answer: Glass Armonica)

Congratulations to Elaine Gaudy of Aflac, recipient of an Amazon gift card.

Do You Hear What I Hear?

Sounds play a significant role in our lives. So much of what we do every day relies on hearing the sounds around us—from the ringtone on our cell phone, to the ring of our doorbell, and most importantly, words spoken between people. Unfortunately, hearing these sounds can prove difficult for many people, but that is where modern technology is looking to make a difference.

Ascending Hearing Technologies, a company out of Wisconsin, founded by Christina Runge and Yi Hu, has developed an iOS app that works with iPhone ear pods to provide real-time sound amplification to assist those suffering from hearing loss. The app begins with a testing of the user's hearing and it adjusts its features based on the results. It can also identify developing hearing loss through these tests and can recommend professional treatment. The team is still fine-tuning the app and is currently working on a noise suppression feature. They have funding support which is allowing clinical trials to take place with users. The goal is to make the app available to the public on the Apple App Store within two years, requiring a monthly subscription. This will allow anyone with an iPhone and ear pods to have access to potentially life changing technology.

Innovation is exciting in any field, however, an app that can help people suffering from hearing loss is worth our attention.