

# Home-Based Businesses — Today's Business Reality

## By Sandy Prater

They're video producers, accountants, lawyers and writers; marketing consultants, artists, desktop publishers, word processors and auditors. Some use the latest in computer and telecommunications technology to connect to the information highway. Many have lush private offices (often a former den or bedroom), a few operate from a card table in the corner of the dining room or share the kids' study space in the basement.

All have one thing in common.

They're owners and operators of home-based businesses.

It's a mistake to think of people who work out of their homes as mere hobbyists. These entrepreneurs are part of an evolution in the way people approach work. Many people can live and work anywhere they choose as long as they have a computer, modem, fax machine and express mail to help them remain connected to the outside world.

Sometimes called "long eagles," home-based business people are doing the work they want to do when they want to do it.

A growing number of freelance professionals are abandoning life in large cities and their position in the 9 to 5 world to move back to a small town. Others, seeking a quieter life with more family time, avoided the stress of corporate life altogether.

Today, nearly 39 million Americans work at home one or more days a week according to Philip Burgess, president of Center for the New West, an institution for policy research, education and economic development in Denver. The number of people working at home at least part of the time increases about 20 percent a year.

"One of the trends we're seeing is a return to a pre-industrial model where more and more people work at home," Burgess said in an interview for U S WEST Review. "It used to be that people's home and economic unit were together. The entire family participated in the business. The separation we've experienced these last 80 years is an aberration."

This writer has operated a home-based business for nearly four years. Leaving a twenty-something corporate career for a more relaxed, less competitive lifestyle has been a dream come true. Competition for good work is sometimes intense; but competition with co-workers for the next great assignment, big bonus or the promotion of a lifetime are simply memories of another time and place.

Doing business while the dog runs in and out and the neighbor's child screams with delight seem to entertain more than annoy clients. Many say they want the same lifestyle, but aren't ready to leave the security of a regular paycheck. Some people who

operate home-based businesses work late into the night and use the normal “work day” for volunteer or family activities.

Running your own business isn't for everyone — and it certainly isn't for the faint of heart. For many, working from home adds another dimension to the risks of self-employment. But for those who have the self-discipline to work at home, running a successful home-based business can be a marvelous way to balance the demands of work with the joy of family, friends and community.

This was a feature article in the Seattle Chapter newsletter of International Association of Business Communicators. It was reprinted in chapter newsletters across North America.