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Companies that will hire you to work at home

In the last few years, working from home has gone from being a rarity to a reality.

With advances in technology, more people are able to link to work from their home computers or laptops. And as employees continue to crave flexibility and yearn for a better work/life balance, more people are working from home for at least part of their workweek.

Home-based companies

While many companies are allowing existing employees to transition to various telecommuting options, some companies are also building work forces that are made up solely of employees working from home.

Here is a sample of 10 companies that only hire at-home workers:

- Alpine Access is a call center company that uses customer service representatives that work from home. Employees use their own telephones and computers. The company provides representatives for clients like Office Depot and J. Crew.
- Convergys hires home-based call center agents who provide support in customer service, and also supplies sales agents or help desk staff for companies.
- Extended Presence provides their clients with outbound sales agents and marketing support staff who work from home.
- Internet Girl Friday provides information technology support as well as administrative services for clients nationwide.
- LiveOps provides customer service support for a variety of major corporations.
- Spheris provides support to medical professionals. Their services include medical transcription and clinical documentation.
- Staffcentrix supplies virtual assistants for business clients, including CEOs and upper management of major corporations.
- VIPDesk provides call center support and also offers a home-based concierge service to clients.
- Voicelog provides representatives to perform verifications for transactions done online or by telephone. Many states require changes to telephone service and other remote transactions to be verified by a third party, which VoiceLog provides.

- West At Home also hires home-based customer service agents. They cater to a specific range of industries, specializing in health care and pharmaceutical support, as well as the hospitality industry.

Employees need to meet some basic requirements, including having a telephone and access to a PC. Although the work is conducted from home, interviews for the job aren't always done remotely.

Working at home is a growing and legitimate opportunity, but workers should still beware of any job that asks you to invest money, provide access to a bank account or give up a great deal of personal information up front. These are indicators of a possible scam.

Traditional companies with home-based workers

Some traditional companies also have home-based workers in the mix as part of their overall staffing strategies. Companies as diverse as American Airlines, TDS Telecom, 1-800-FLOWERS, Sprint and Xerox have programs that enable traditional workers to transition to telecommuting or hire workers specifically to work at home.

Aetna is one of the companies that has developed and implemented such a program. "Our telework program started as a grassroots initiative to keep talented employees when there were site consolidations," Aetna Telework Program head Eileen Levin explains.

The program, which started only a few years ago, has become very popular with employees. Levin notes that since the inception of the program, participation has jumped 300 percent. Around 10,000 Aetna employees, or 27 percent of the company's work force, now work from home.

Levin says that the company looks at several factors before transitioning a job or task to be done at home. Aetna ensures that the employee is an appropriate candidate to work at home. It also confirms that the home office is a stable, business-friendly environment. And most importantly, Aetna carefully considers whether the job is an appropriate choice to be performed by home-based workers.

Children's Healthcare of Atlanta is another company that is mixing traditional workers with employees who work from home. These home-based employees include medical transcriptionists and nurses who operate the hospital's Advice Line, a hotline where Laurie Peterson, one of the Advice Line nurses, has been working for CHOA from home for 11 years. She takes calls that vary from minor questions to emergency situations, and provides callers with a recommended course of action based on their conversations.

Peterson says, "I really enjoy being able to use my nursing judgment and experience right here in the convenience of my own home. We get inquiries from people both locally and all over the world seeking help with their child's health problems. At the end of a shift, it's very fulfilling for me to know I've helped allay a parent's fears."

If you're a worker who wants to transition from commuting to the office to working at home, talk to your company. Think about these discussion points before approaching your boss:

- Talk to the company about how offering this option to you and other employees will benefit them. Money talks, so be sure to refer to any potential savings the company will see by implementing this program. With gas prices at a record high, you should also underscore your savings, as well as the environmental benefits of working from home.
- Not every job or every process can be done from home, so be ready with a plan. Identify jobs and transactions at the company that can be done easily, safely and securely from home.