

Office in a Box – The Evolution of Workplaces

The fast-paced changes in digital technology and the increasing use of cloud storage have helped many professionals to choose a flexible style for their work model. They can complete their projects from home or from any other location. This not only brings down the costs of office administration but also leads to a more fulfilling work-life balance.

Amidst such developments, the business world has acknowledged the practicalities of a compact virtual office, or Office in a Box – an all-inclusive cloud-based solution that offers all the usual facilities of a traditional office setup without the need of a physical space and infrastructure.

Today, more people have access to smartphones, laptops and Internet connectivity than ever before. This has contributed to a new era of flexible work hours and work-from-home practices.

The idea of working away from the main physical premises of an office has stemmed from a combination of modern technological innovation and the general attitude towards jobs that was observed even during the Industrial Revolution – a time when a majority of the professionals involved in vocations such as farming, medical practices, retailing and toolmaking worked from their preferred locations.

As mobility and BYOD trends touch organisations of all sizes, the virtual office, also referred to as ‘Office in a Box’, has become a reality. A well-planned Office in a Box facilitates communication and professional business services with the option of participating in periodic corporate meetings from any location. It has a suite of communications systems, hardware and software to recreate a real office environment that also projects a professional, business image.

An Office in a Box can be a powerful tool for small and medium enterprises that wish to control their start-up costs while also establishing their presence alongside bigger businesses. For significantly less investment than what goes

into setting up a full-time physical office, new entrepreneurs can use these virtual offices to provide their services in new markets.

It sounds good, but are there any challenges in setting up an Office in a Box?

Although a flexible virtual office comes with its benefits, simply letting employees work from different locations by using their own devices can become challenging. The main problems that can possibly arise include:

- Numerous and different technologies and equipment components to manage
- The unavailability of designated IT staff at remote locations
- The use of outdated and/or inefficient technology by some devices on the network
- Bandwidth capacity problems

Employees connecting to the Office in a Box may have devices that lack adequate security features and this increases the possibility of security threats in the entire network.

What is the solution?

To address these challenges, it is advisable to adopt an integrated approach towards setting up your virtual office. Instead of having disparate systems loosely connected to each other, an Office in a Box needs to be on a unified platform that enables secure voice and data services on a single network connection. It should have an inbuilt firewall and features such as anti-malware, anti-spam and web application securities.

All applications and services are stored in a cloud that can have a capacity running into hundreds of GBs.

Along with these, the Office in a Box should come with online backup and recovery solutions that can put the business processes back on track in minimum time if at all a disaster strikes.

In a nutshell, the professional solution for Office in a Box has to come from a trusted vendor that offers a variety of features necessary to keep the 'office' functional and secure round the clock.

What are the main benefits of this technology-oriented solution over a traditional office setup?

The principal advantage of a smart Office in a Box is that it helps a business seem bigger and more established while also giving it the access to amenities available in well-furnished office premises. Even start-ups can cast a favourable impression on their clients with the services included in their infrastructure. And they can still let their employees work from homes or any remote location.

An Office in a Box also helps small and medium enterprises in cost control, which is more challenging for a traditional or physical office setup. The administrative and technical costs get curtailed and this lowers the overall maintenance costs.

A number of small business owners typically use their personal mobile phones to answer business queries and connect with customers. With an integrated Office in a Box, however, they often get a landline phone number that can be answered by a professional associate through business hours. The calls from this number can also be forwarded to the concerned employees or departments. Such provisions build a more professional brand image for the organisation and also minimise the chances of missing calls and business opportunities.

What kinds of businesses will benefit from an Office in a Box?

Any small business, start-up or individual professional can reap the advantages from the features and solutions provided by a smart, virtual office.

Some specific use cases are:

- Freelancers who do not work in their clients' offices and wish to keep an independent brand persona and presence
- Professionals who do not want to reveal their residential addresses or phone numbers on their marketing collateral and business papers
- Small enterprises that are gradually growing into new zones but have not yet built a permanent presence in those markets

- Businesses that are looking for new customers who in turn wish to start projects in their local areas
- Sales executives who frequently visit prospective clients but also need an organised office space for their work and correspondence with other departments

Offices in a Box are pragmatic solutions for modern enterprises because they bring an easily scalable and rapid implementation setup with minimal infrastructure costs.