

# The Challenges of Building a Productive Workforce

## Executive Summary

It is very difficult to measure the productivity of the modern workforce. You can measure the output of an individual, a team or the entire company in various ways, in both financial or non-financial terms, but how do you know if that represents efficiency or inefficiency. Managers cannot stand over every single team member and watch everything that they are doing. As so much work is now performed via computers, this further compounds the challenge to know what the workforce is really doing on those computers and even where it is genuine business activity, how do you know if they are using those systems effectively.

Studies have shown there are two principal root causes to low productivity within the typical workforce:

- **Non-Business Use of Computers**  
Employees wasting time through non-business related use of their computer. This personal use of the business' computer includes a great variety of different activities, such as social media, online banking, shopping, paying bills, personal research, reading the news and many other things. Most businesses are reasonable and will tolerate a certain amount of that activity – after all, nobody wants a workforce of robots and as with anything in life, there has to be a certain amount of give and take in order to have a flexible workforce, but how do you know how much of this is going on, who is doing it and whether it has become excessive and gone beyond what you would tolerate as reasonable? In recent polls performed by Gallup and salary.com, the results demonstrate that, on average, employees are wasting more than an hour each day on non-business related activities on their computers. To put that in perspective, for a company with a workforce of 100 employees paying the UK national average wage, that equates to over 29,000 lost hours of work every year and well over £500,000 in lost productivity.
- **Ineffective Use of Computers**  
Employees ability to use the business software on their computers is often not as good as it could be. If you can't watch over what every employee is doing, and if they don't raise their hand to declare their issue, which many will not, then you will now know who has this challenge and to what degree. It is often the case that the employee isn't aware there is an issue because they do something the way that they have always done it, or been shown in the past on how to do it, and they don't know any better. It is easy to see how bad practices can creep into the workforce over time because of this and lead to inefficiencies.

The final aspect to the overall challenge is time and skills. In today's business world, time is a scarce commodity and you won't necessarily have the in house skills to be able to monitor what your workforce is doing on their computers. Furthermore, if you were to monitor what they're doing, it would potentially be information overload and you would be bombarded with that much information, it would then be impossible to filter down to the actual detail needed because you haven't got the time to do that.

## The Traditional Approach

The solution that many businesses have previously taken to this challenge is to set company policies that define what is acceptable use of a computer or how much training an employee should have and how often;

- **Acceptable Use Policy**

There is a common problem with the policy only approach. Every business should create policies to restrict non-business use of computers via an Acceptable Use Policy because that sets out your expectations as a business as to what is or isn't acceptable behaviour, the issue here however is how do you know if those policies are being adhered to?

- **Training**

The same applies to training. Even if you have a policy that defines how much training an employee should receive, how do you know if it was effective and that they know how to use the software on their computer to an adequate level of competency?

Policies rarely work just their own. Policies set an expectation as to what you, the employer, consider to be acceptable behaviour from your employees, but by themselves, they do not enforce nor measure that the policy is being observed. Without something to actively enforce a policy or passively monitor whether or not it is being adhered to, you are left with hoping that it is being followed. Beyond productivity, this also causes challenges around data loss and legal / regulatory compliance.

Additionally; a one size fits all training solution often means training is wasted as it doesn't target the specific areas where employees need training, furthermore how do you then measure afterwards whether the training has delivered a return to the business.

The reason this approach does not work is therefore quite simple; if you cannot measure the size of the problem then you cannot take the necessary steps to do something about it nor can you determine if you've successfully fixed it.

### **Key Point - Measuring & Managing**

The simple fact is that most businesses do not know how to measure the problem and are left with the hope that policies are being followed and their training delivers the required knowledge to staff so that they know how to use computers and software properly and efficiently.

Given that the surveys and real life evidence show this is clearly not the case, that means businesses have a problem that cannot be easily measured or managed effectively, but is clearly a problem that could be impacting the typical business to the tune of 15% in lost profits.

There is no doubt that policies and staff training are important and they are part of the solution, but the traditional solution is missing one vital component – being able to measure the problem and provide the information to equip the business to manage and improve that situation.

## The Solution – User Activity Monitoring

User Activity Monitoring can help solve this challenge and provide businesses with a route through to improved productivity and greater profits.

It is possible to monitor and record every aspect of computer usage, thereby providing you with valuable information about how your organisations computers are being used and delivering an unrivalled insight into the productivity and computer user behaviour of your workforce. The technology aspect to this solution is relatively simple; a small software agent is installed on your employee computers to capture key usage information and transmit that data back to a centralised server where it can be processed and analysed to provide alerts in real time to inform the business of potential security issues and also to be collated into reports to illustrate factual information on computer usage across the organisation.

User Activity Monitoring can dramatically reduce the misuse of business computers and thereby improve productivity in a number of ways;

- If employees know that their computer use is being monitored, then it will ensure that a lot of employees adhere to your policies. In most businesses, a majority of employees want to be honest and adhere to these policies but typically need a little help to remember that, and knowing that their use is being monitored achieves that.
- If your policy defines a certain amount of personal use being acceptable or certain times of the day where such use is acceptable, then monitoring enables the business to ensure that it is kept within those boundaries but also alert you to where it goes beyond that, thereby equipping you with the information to manage that situation proactively.

In the same way that every business is different, departments within the same business are not always the same and therefore different monitoring policies can be applied to these to suit different expectations and tolerances. The key differentiator is that monitoring enables a business to measure employee computer usage and provide managers with the information they need to be able to do something about those employees that are misusing their computers, which in turn will lead to an improvement in productivity. Once a business is operating at a productive level with an acceptable use of its computers by employees for personal purposes, then monitoring ensures that it stays at that level and bad habits don't creep back in.

The information captured can pinpoint where users are losing time in their computer based tasks. It can also enable comparisons between employees across the business or in certain departments by grouping people together for analysis and reporting. This then enables the business to identify which users require training and in which applications. This is a win-win for productivity in that the training can be targeted to the specific area that needs addressing, which minimises the impact on the employee because they don't have to waste time getting trained on aspects of the software that they already know, and then the training will deliver further improved productivity by improving the skills of the employee to work more efficiently than before.

Computer usage is monitored and recorded providing valuable information about how computers are being used and an unrivalled insight into the productivity and user behaviour of your workforce. This is all done in a balanced way by protecting the privacy of employees with options such as not recording activity on banking websites or masking usernames and passwords.

### **Additional Solution Benefits**

As well as addressing the original challenges identified, there are other productivity benefits that employee monitoring can bring.

- **Replicating Productive Working Habits**  
Once you know exactly who your most productive employees are, this can enable their working practices to be analysed and replicated across your teams for the benefit of everyone and for the overall productivity of the business.
- **Measuring Unproductive Time**  
One such benefit is measuring and managing the amount of time someone doesn't spend at their computer. Whilst the intended result was to measure the use or misuse of a business computer, monitoring can also identify how much overall work employees are actually doing.
- **Facts Not Guesswork**  
Monitoring enables a business to quantify the impact of lost productivity and therefore doesn't rely on suspicion or guesswork, thereby taking away assumption and enabling managers and staff to work together on improving work habits. Improving productivity is delivered by helping employees to become more efficient computer users and to help them better manage their time, as well as benefitting the business this benefits the welfare of the individual and their respective teams and colleagues. Monitoring can prove or disprove that theory; if it shows that the employee in question works a productive day, then there isn't a problem and you don't have to worry about it but if it does show there is a problem, then it equips the business with the evidence to quantify the scope of the problem and then to manage the employee to improve their work habits and thereby improve their productivity.
- **Employee Welfare**  
It can sometimes be difficult to identify where employees are working longer and harder than is healthy in the long term – whilst it is good to have employees that work the extra hours, this can be very short term if it results in such people leaving because they are unhappy with that situation. Monitoring equips you with the information about the work habits of your employees and therefore you can make informed decisions about them. Unproductive employees can also impact productive employees because they have to work longer and/or harder to make up for the shortfall.

## Choosing a Monitoring Solution

When selecting a monitoring solution, you must determine whether you will deploy and manage a solution in-house or consider a “Managed Service” from a specialist technology partner who has the capability to implement and manage a solution for you.

Key aspects for consideration in a monitoring Solution;

- **Information Management**  
The sheer amount of information captured can be overwhelming and you must have the time and experience to be able to filter this down into meaningful data that you can understand and then use in the course of managing your business.
- **Sensitive Information**  
Some of the information captured will be sensitive, either commercially or from a people perspective. It is sensible to keep this information secure and within the business’ network security perimeter, however this may present an issue for internal IT staff or external IT contractors who should be denied access to sensitive information.
- **Private Cloud, Not Public Cloud**  
As the information is sensitive, it is not suitable to be stored within the public cloud nor do you want it transmitted across the internet using insecure means.
- **Employee Privacy**  
Some employees might be concerned about what is being monitored. Setting out expectations via an Acceptable Use Policy is a first step and then monitoring against that policy ensures employees understand what is acceptable. Furthermore, monitoring can be customised to specific times of day - for example, if you allow any personal use at lunchtime or for organisations that allow employees to use their own device it is possible to enable monitoring purely within office hours when that device is being used for work.

### **Choosing a Managed Service**

If you're not in the business of computer usage monitoring, then any time you spend on implementing, maintaining and managing the solution is time not spent on your core business activities.

The best solution may be to pick a technology partner who will implement and manage the monitoring solution for you according to best practice but also with an understanding of your needs as a business. This would mean that the alerting and reporting is tailored to suit you, thereby not taking up any more of your time than is necessary and this would not take you away from your day job whilst equipping you with the information you need to improve the productivity of your business for the benefit of the employees and the business as a whole.

The partner should bring efficiencies and best practice gained through the experience of doing this as its core business, this not only saves you money compared to having an in-house solution but also provides a better quality service overall.

The optimum solution would be to have the solution hosted in a private cloud data centre where the data is encrypted and a secure Virtual Private Network connection back to your office network. This means the communications are secure and also means that the computer equipment and any data collected is still within your overall network security perimeter, thereby giving you the benefits that a cloud service brings without any security compromises or data storage concerns.

Having regular service reviews with your partner to run through reports to help you understand what is going on, proactive support and guidance for alerts and security events whilst benchmarking against KPIs specifically defined for your business will ensure that the solution has continuous improvement built in from the start, meaning you should always be deriving best value and ensuring a return on investment for the business.

## Conclusions

Implementing a User Activity Monitoring solution shouldn't be seen as negative, employees don't generally stand by the water cooler and chat about non-work activities for an hour each day in front of their manager, so why shouldn't the same principle be applied to their use of a computer. There are actually benefits for employees in implementing such a solution and it is fair to conclude that the employees who would be negatively impacted by a monitoring solution are those who waste business time on non-business activities for their own personal gain, so from a business perspective, there is much to gain from implementing this solution.

It is unrealistic to ask Managers to oversee their teams computer activity without providing the tools to perform the task, without a monitoring solution they can be unaware of just how unproductive or productive their teams are and unable to measure it, and without measuring productivity and operational efficiency, it is very difficult to address these issues and improve the effectiveness of the business.

Monitoring should be seen as a way of identifying who needs help and in what areas. That benefits the business through improved productivity and better profits and it benefits the employee because a higher performing business means better job security. Brighter future job prospects and improved working habits mean employees are less likely to be overburdened with tasks and not suffer from not having enough time in the day to do them.

In summary, a business has to be competitive in order to exist and grow. If it isn't competitive, then it will be overtaken by competitors and in the end cease to exist.

Being a competitive business means having a productive workforce.

## Benefits Summary

- Improve profitability through identifying unproductive employees and equipping managers with the information to measure and improve that situation.
- Improve operational efficiencies through understanding where employees are spending, or losing, the most time within line of business applications and non-work related applications and activities.
- Identify your most productive employees, enabling you to either strategically place those employees within teams or to review and copy their working practices for the benefit of the whole business.
- Improve employee retention through ensuring your managers know the working practices of their teams and giving them data to enable informed decisions to be made.
- Get early visibility of problems with employees before they occur through spotting anomalies in user behaviour and proactively manage welfare of employees.



### About Seccura

Seccura is a privately held IT Security company dedicated to protecting critical data assets and enhancing corporate and personal productivity. Our aim is to provide peace of mind for our customers so they remain focussed on managing and growing their business.

For further detail and contact information please visit the Seccura Website at [www.seccura.co.uk](http://www.seccura.co.uk)

© 2016 Seccura Limited. All rights reserved. No portions of this document may be reproduced without prior written consent of Seccura Limited. Seccura, Securwatch, the Seccura logo and other names are registered trademarks of Seccura Limited in the United Kingdom. All other brands or products are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective holders and should be treated as such.