Ascentive

A look into productivity problems faced in the workplace and how to resolve them.

Within this document, we discuss the latest problems that are reducing productivity and causing concern within the workplace. We also evaluate the causes for these problems and our options to resolve them. Then we try to determine the best short and long-term approach to increase employee satisfaction, focus and re-claim lost productivity.

This guide is written for small to medium business owners and day-to-day managers, but it is just as valuable to enterprise-wide CEOs, Presidents, CIO's, and IT directors in the private and public sector. The problems discussed are universal and scale small and large organizations across most industries. In short, this document applies to you.

Is there really a problem? Do I need to address this?

There are several issues that exist in a typical office environment that should concern us: 1) First, the amount of time being spent doing non-work related activity. 2) Second, the need to protect proprietary and confidential information that may be leaking out of our companies. 3) And third, our responsibility to curtail illegal or harassing behavior that occurs during work hours.

First, the amount of wasted time at work is a bigger problem than any of us would like to admit. According to recent studies, in a typical office environment, over 81 minutes worth of work time per employee per day is blown doing non-work related activity—especially on the Web (surfing porn, playing on-line games, gambling, shopping, dating, looking for new work, or running a side business). In fact, 13% habitually rack up two or more hours per day of non-work related web activity.

Protecting proprietary company information is a second concern.

- About 29% of the 1,395 employees surveyed by one IT company admitted to taking confidential company material when they left for a new job.
- At one company, the Sales Director copied the entire company customer database in the hour prior to giving his notice.

- At another company with over 4,000 people, three VP's were fired for allegedly starting their own competing company. Within hours, an internal employee who was still their friend had exported and e-mailed them the entire company customer database, along with proprietary documents that would allow the three to easily replicate much of their prior company's operations.

All types of critical and proprietary information has leaked out of companies electronically via e-mail, diskettes, flash drives and even within the storage inside Razr phones and iPods.

A third concern is the need to curtail illegal, unethical or harassing behavior. Workplace harassment takes many forms—including e-mails sent by coworkers who share potentially offensive jokes and images. A women sitting within line of site of regular offensive images on her manager's computer could sue for sexual harassment. Likewise, an employee who receives an offensive e-mail or instant message may, unknown to the sender, have a gay relative or a minority spouse and take offense— leading to a law suit.

Although some of the overtly offensive e-mails may be controlled, off-color e-mails are often flying through office servers—the accumulation of which can be used as proof that there is an overall harassing tone at the office. The excuse that an employer is not aware of this behavior and is not liable is being denied by the courts, such as the New Jersey Supreme Court case, in Gaines V. Bellion, which ruled that an employer could not use "not aware" as a defense unless he could show he had provided anti-harassment training.

What is this costing us?

> "With just 20 employees you are loosing almost $100k per year in time paid for, but not received."

If we calculate the average wasted time per employee in a typical office, we end up with 6.75 hours per week, or 337 hours per year (at 50 weeks). That's over 8 weeks of time, per employee, per year that is wasted. If your average employee makes $30k/year or $600/week x 8 = $4,800 of work time that is non-productive. How many employees do you have? If you have 20 employees you could be loosing almost $100k per year in time paid for, but not received.

If we add in the cost for lost company secrets and proprietary information (such as a proprietary manufacturing process, unique savings that make the business model work, a customer database that makes it easy for a competitor to poach clients), or the cost of a single lost harassment law suit, we would be talking tens if not millions of dollars in loss revenue to competitors and via lawsuits. This amount could bankrupt many small companies and severely damage even the largest.

It hasn't always been this way. How did this come about?

Consider this. Ten years ago, would a trusted, hard-working employee

- spend hours searching through the yellow pages during peak work hours, then *call* dozens of stores *during work hours* just to see if there were any specials?
- open a Sears catalog, spend half an hour picking out items and then grab the company phone and place an order, while their associates worked within feet of them?

Yet a "good" employee may not think twice about spending hours searching online for the right gift or the latest special for valentines or Christmas—during work hours.

Have you ever seen two employees grab a Monopoly board game and play for hours—then cover it with a newspaper when the boss came by? Hopefully not.

Yet we see the company network burst at the seams while numerous employees battle it out via an online collaborative game—and then press Alt Tab to switch to their spreadsheet if anyone peeks into their cube.

Would an employee who had just been reprimanded rush back to his desk, start filling up boxes with proprietary company documents and then dolly them out of the building to their car—prior to walking out? Unthinkable.

But the same employee may e-mail himself hundreds of proprietary files and the entire company database (which information may have filled an entire cabinet if printed) prior to giving notice.

We may not want to think about it, but this is what is happening every day in offices everywhere. Why?

> "...can now be carried off-site in seconds within a $10 flash drive hidden in your pocket."

With the onslaught of the information age, including the Internet, instant messaging (on the desktop, phone and Blackberry), and massive amounts of e-mail (the typical office employee receives 81 e-mails per day), the average worker is bombarded with information and distractions that never existed just 10 years ago.

It is also now all too easy for someone to access, copy and distribute proprietary information inside and out of the company within seconds. What would have taken hundreds of file folders, dozens of boxes and a cart to remove, can now be carried off-site in seconds within a $10 flash drive hidden in your pocket.

And a tasteless joke with graphic attachments (a lawsuit waiting to happen) can easily be sent to the "wrong" fellow employee—with a sensitively unknown to the sender, or to thousands of fellow employees (instead of the intended friend) with the simple click of a wrong button.

Would any of us have acted this way in the past—during work hours? Seldom. Yet we see this happening at work via e-mail and the internet on a regular basis.

Many of these problems are brand new, and they are the result of the new information age. It has happened so quickly that we haven't had time to adjust our managerial approaches to address it. We have to realize, all said and done, that this is an electronic information problem. Perhaps it's time we consider an electronic cure.

What are the alternatives?

We could roll back the clock 10-15 years and eliminate e-mail and the Internet—the distractions and inherit risks would be gone. But we have become dependant on this new form of communication—most employees need e-mail and many employees need online access to do their jobs.
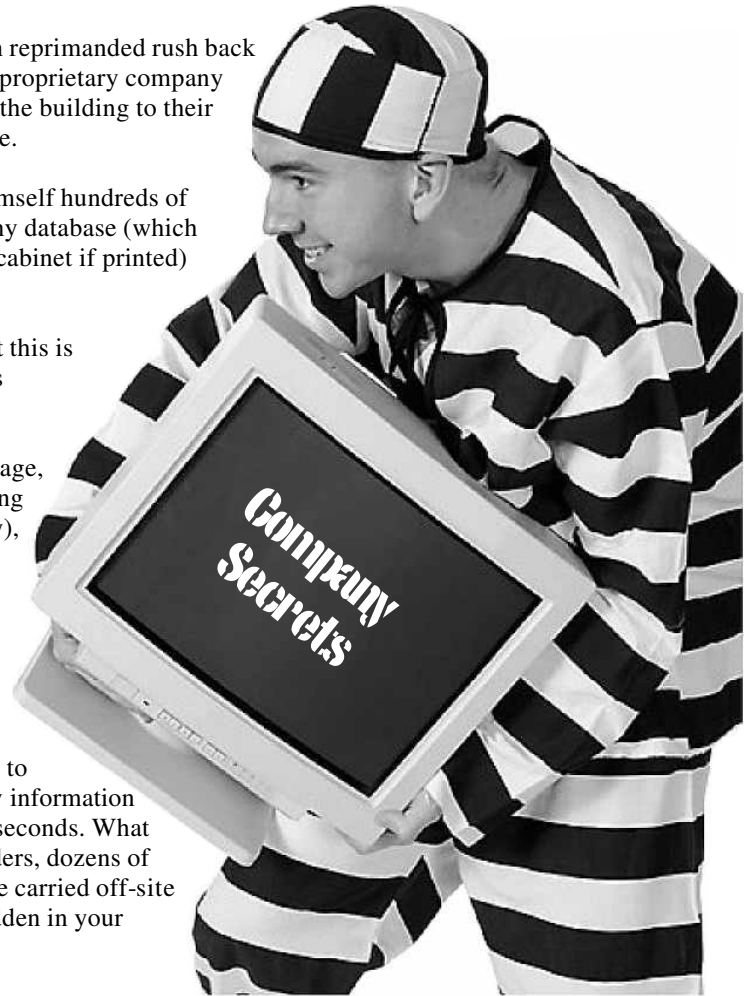
We can setup filters to block offensive sites and shopping networks. This works, but it won't let you see if employees are e-mailing offensive messages, or if disgruntled employees are offloading proprietary information. Blocking software just doesn't provide management with the required tools to effectively identify and manage their greatest risks

Workplace Activity Management software

Another approach to solve our productivity problems is with PC monitoring—using the latest Workplace Activity Management software (WAM). A good Workplace Activity Management software

is comprehensive and records all system activity (including database exports and files saved), web-surfing, e-mails, and instant messages in real time, recording screen shots, time used and content. Administrators can view reports and activity from anywhere and can be automatically notified when select key words, websites or specific applications are accessed by individuals, departments or the entire enterprise.

Workplace Activity Management software helps companies determine if a problem exists. If there isn't a problem, the software will confirm it (time to praise the team). If there is, the software will find it, help us know the frequency and how serious it is—from harmless reviews of movies and weather, to addictive porn or harassing e-mails, to running a side business, interviewing, or downloading & stealing the company database.

> "WAM...identifies problem areas, offenders, frequency and seriousness…"

The software identifies problem areas, offenders, frequency and seriousness, so we can coach employees, reduce company risk, and help the team reclaim productivity. We can often resolve the problems quickly by initiating better policies, setting up better access control, or through employee coaching and motivation so the team doesn't loose focus and waste hours on the Web—or contribute to any behavior that would damage the company or cause embarrassment and liability to the employee.

Workplace Activity Management software rewards the best employees (we catch them doing what's right), and deters those that might intentionally do wrong or distract the team. Workplace Activity Management software provides the tools for management to identify and manage their risks 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, from anywhere in the world! When used properly, it is a valuable assessment tool to help improve, motivate and grow strong organizations and companies.

Concerns–Big Brother is Watching You

One of the concerns with Workplace Activity Management software is that most employers don't want to propagate the big brother mentality. Nobody likes to be monitored. Even the thought of it makes our skin crawl. Yet most of us don't seem to mind or be concerned with the current monitoring systems.

For example, security access control systems log our time in and out of facilities, e-mails are stored since many companies are legally required to retain all e-mail, and some organizations (like stock brokerage firms), or high-security installations (military) must review e-mails that contain select words to avoid allegations of insider trading or inadvertent transfer of classified information. In addition, many companies have security cameras that monitor everyone—including customers (banks), and it is common for sales and support phone calls to be recorded and monitored (for "quality" control (also great for coaching)).

Why then can't we monitor desktops?

Let's get right to the heart of the matter—is it our constitutional right to be able to shop, view porn, day-trade, look for other work, play computer games, gamble, watch videos, bid on e-auctions, instant message our friends and family all day long, maintain personal blogs, transfer files back and forth to home, or send personal or potentially harassing e-mails?

"*...without exception, it is dishonest and you are stealing from your employer (white collar crime)…*"

Maybe…but NOT when you're at work, on a network and equipment that doesn't belong to you and when someone is paying you good money to get a job done. In this case, without exception, it is dishonest and you are stealing from your employer (white collar crime)—no matter how socially acceptable or prevalent the practice. It is not an inalienable right that employers provide unlimited high-speed internet access, or unencumbered e-mail—it's a perk, and it is a valuable resource, but it is too often abused (remember the average 81 minutes of non-work related "activity" cited earlier?).

On the flip side, many of these perks are also difficult for employees to resist. It is as though you have placed a tempting 15 or 20 inch window facing a playground of distractions right in front of your employees—and then you tell them to concentrate and *get back to work*. No wonder we have a problem. However, we created this problem, and we must solve it if we are going to help our organizations grow and achieve increased productivity.

Another Concern—Network Resources

Whenever we talk about monitoring PC's remotely, or saving the information, we must address network bandwidth and storage concerns. Fortunately, well designed Workplace Activity Management software is transparent to the user, takes less than 1% of network utilization, and it uses surprisingly little storage.
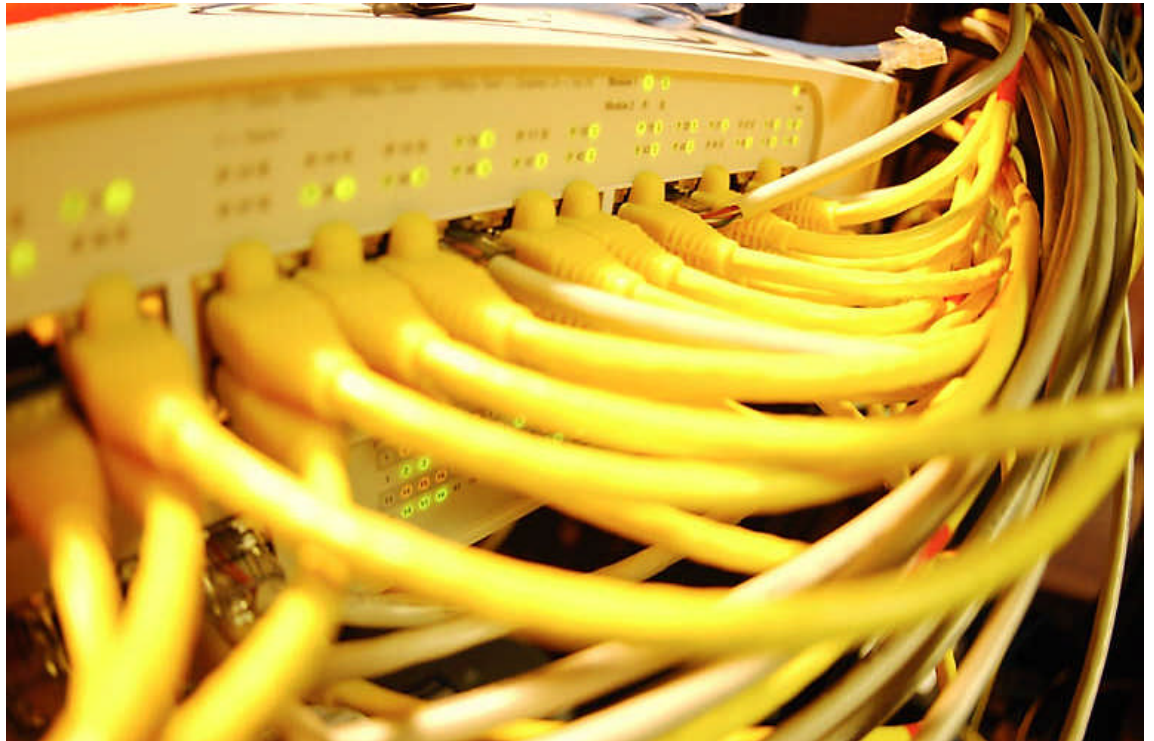
In fact, a single 250 GB network drive (available for $200) can store up to 3 years of monitoring data for up to 50 employees.

Properly engineered Workplace Activity Management software can also be installed remotely through the network, without having to install it physically by going PC to PC. It should also be extremely easy-to-use, allowing select IT, executive or middle management easy access, with minimal assistance, to manage and improve the activity of their respective teams.

"...90% drop in Internet and network traffic when the policy was announced."

In addition, Workplace Activity Management software re-claims bandwidth that was previously used wastefully. If you decide to notify employees (it can run in stealth mode or visibly) that you have deployed Workplace Activity Management software as part of your overall security strategy, and that the system automatically records and archives e-mail, chat, internet and desktop activity, you may find that the organization behaves differently. One company experienced over 90% drop in Internet and network traffic when the policy was announced—reducing the need to purchase more bandwidth or new servers. Productivity also increased substantially.

What Can I Expect?

"BeAware showed me exactly what the team was and was not doing, so I could re-motivate them to help us meet our goals."

"The software detected words in a specific e-mail from one of our managers that could be considered harassment and it automatically sent me a notification. It was pretty blatant. I had a good heart-to-heart with my manager and got it resolved. I also put out a general memo reiterating company policy. I then immediately hired a consultant to conduct management sensitively training so we could rid this attitude from our company. I didn't have a clue about the negative behavior I needed to address prior to using the software."

"One employee found a new job with a competitor, gave notice--then proceeded to copy dozens of confidential files and the company database. Our software sent us an e-mail based on screening criteria we had setup. We caught him at the door, and prevented a potential disaster!"

"I had no idea a few of my "good" employees were addicted to porn, or the number that wasted so much time during work hours. I didn't single them out, but I did setup better Internet filters (some sites weren't caught), established better policies (including no flash drives), and re-adjusted some job descriptions to include new projects (less time to browse the Web). I also let the teams know of our new Workplace Activity Management software to help us get to the next level. I've checked the software logs and it appears to be working very well—all positive, no negatives."

> "WAM...should be one of the primary tools considered to solve this problem."

What's Holding You Back?

Now that you are aware of the problems responsible for decreasing productivity in the workplace, and the alternatives—including Workplace Activity Management software; what are you going to do about it?

By providing the Internet, e-mail and instant messaging, you brought your company into the information age—and you automatically inherited the corresponding distractions and problems that may actually be reducing productivity—instead of increasing it. Filtering software and good policies will help. We can also coach and rededicate those caught up in non-productive behavior, but we must first discover who they are. For this, we use Workplace Activity Management software, which should be one of the primary tools considered to solve this problem.

Summary

Companies seeking to increase productivity and reduce their legal and financial risks can benefit from Workplace Activity Management software. For the first time management can assess, in real time, the level of inefficiency within their organizations, so they can address them and improve their financial bottom line. In addition, once implemented, employers can refocus their energy on growing their business and driving employee productivity.

We invite you to find out more about Workplace Activity Management software and how it can help increase the productivity at your organization. Go to www.beawarecorporate.com/benefits.

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