You know that the secret to being successful as a small business is hiring the absolute best employees you can find. However, the right fit in terms of personality, work style, and strengths may not always be located in your same ZIP code. While small-business owners often have a remote employee or two working for their company, many are taking it to the next level by creating a virtual office using cloud-based technology that supports virtual communications.

Virtual communications can turn your team into a cohesive unit, no matter where members are located.

This means all employees work out of their home offices — even if they live in the same city as others — and there is no physical office location. One of the biggest benefits is that your small business saves considerable money on rent, furniture, and office supplies. Another is that you can hire the best employee for the position, regardless of location. However, along with the benefits, virtual offices bring some challenges when it comes to communication and collaboration.

**Talking with Customers and Co-Workers**

Your team gives your customers amazing service if your customers can get in contact with your company. Today's business communication systems have the technology needed to virtually connect employees and customers, no matter their locations or devices.
One of the first decisions you need to make when moving to a virtual office is choosing a business communication system. If that system has a virtual receptionist feature, your customers can dial a single number and then be connected with the right employee for their specific need. This message can be customized and changed very easily.

Remote employees will likely use their personal mobile devices to take business calls, as most people won't want to carry two phones around. If your communication system has a mobile connect feature, an employee's phone number can be transferred to whatever device he or she is currently using. And, best of all, the customer won't know that the employee is talking on a personal device— they'll only see the business phone number.

**Collaboration Technology**

As virtual communications become more and more common, you need to figure out the best ways for everyone can work together. You need a simple way for your team to share ideas, files and develop a real team vibe, even if they're not in the same room. By using a cloud-based file-sharing system, you can make sure that everyone can access important information using whatever devices they're working from — not to mention wherever their location happens to be.

It's the inside jokes, the teasing, the drinking of endless cups of coffee, and the late-night brainstorming sessions that create a team, not the mere fact of working together. This is one of the biggest challenges of virtual offices. However, by using chat and video conferencing, your team can create a rapport that will translate into a cohesive group working together to reach a common goal.

**Keeping Employees on Task**

You may be wondering how you will know that your employees are really working and not watching the latest cat videos on YouTube. However, the same technology that gives your employees plenty of distractions gives you a window into what they're doing. Through cloud technology, you can reach your employees at any time of day through chat, voice, or video calls. A quick look at your file systems shows you exactly which files each employee accessed at what time and how long they worked on each document. If your goofing-off radar is on high-alert, you can set up call recording so you can make sure employees are actually spending their phone time helping customers, not discussing weekend plans with friends for hours on end.

So, if you're paying rent but many of your employees work remotely or would prefer to work remotely, take a minute to consider creating a virtual office. Your employees, customers, and bottom line will thank you.

*For more information on the technology needed to start a virtual office, contact a Vonage Business representative.*