Measuring Remote Employee Productivity
Measuring Remote Employee Productivity

You’re not alone.

Many companies today are allowing employees to work remotely. A full third of companies allow some employees to work from home, with 10% of Americans telecommuting at least once a week.¹ With technologies like Cloud-based applications, video conferencing, VoIP calling and others in play, remote employees are fully enabled to get their job done, no matter where they are.

There are many reasons why employees work from home. For some it’s about removing distractions and finishing work. For others, productivity is thought to be higher overall. And for some, it’s about maintaining a work-life balance.

Additionally, there are other benefits to allow remotely working: improved employee satisfaction, reduced attrition, reduced unscheduled absences, and an expanded potential talent pool.

But with those benefits, there also come challenges.

Even employees who work from the office are blending home and work – they check personal email, go on social media, make personal plans, pay bills online, etc. It should be expected that an employee working remotely is going to blend home and work even more.

While some employees cite less work distractions while working from home, there are obvious home distractions that are going to be even more prevalent and, in some cases like a sick child, simply cannot be avoided.

Only 15% of bosses today encourage working remotely¹, and, regardless of the various issues bosses state as the reason they don’t like remote working, it boils down to one simple fact: they want to know their employees are working.

In a traditional office environment, it’s easy to walk by an employee’s desk. It’s obviously not so easy when someone is a thousand miles away.

So, how do you know if your remote employees are productive?

¹ http://www.onlinedegrees.com/degree360/visuals/clocking-couch.html
The Challenge of Gauging Productivity

Companies with remote employees are generally concerned about productivity from two angles. Some companies wonder “Are they working at all?” while others are more concerned with “Are they working efficiently?”

Yahoo hit the headlines recently over issues with remote employees and productivity. They used VPN logs to “determine” remote employees weren’t getting the job done. Given that not every job function requires connectivity to the VPN, this obviously isn’t a universally perfect test.

Let’s look at some of the ways companies measure productivity.

Measurable Results

Measuring productivity based on results requires quantifiable metrics, which can be one of the most challenging for businesses. In job functions like a call center representative, a simple metric of calls per hour can be used. But when you have employees with varying responsibilities, creating metrics for each person will be continually required with some degree of frequency.

Also, keep in mind that meeting a measurement doesn’t necessarily equate to productivity. If goals are set too low, an employee accomplishing the desired result may not be working at full capacity.

Connectivity to the Office

Just because an employee is connected to the office by a VPN doesn’t mean they’re working. And it also doesn’t necessarily mean they’re not.

For example, if a review of the VPN logs showed an employee was connected throughout the workday, but had minimal bandwidth usage, were they productive or not? It’s not that easy to tell. Some job functions might only require connection through a VPN to retrieve email, with most work locally performed on their laptop. Other jobs may require the heavy use of company resources through a VPN. Still others may retrieve email on their smartphone and not connect to a VPN at all.

Connectivity to the office as a productivity measurement only becomes viable if you define the various roles within the organization (and therefore connectivity “personas”) and measure each to a relative benchmark. And, even then, connectivity doesn’t quantify productive from non-productive work; it only defines the frequency, duration and bandwidth use of the connection to the office.

Application-Specific Activity

Applications like SalesForce have their own built-in auditing of activity, giving management insight into whether work is being done. While this will provide a documented trail of activity, it’s important to note it is limited to the use of a single application. And you don’t have time to correlate data from every application to reconstruct an employee’s day.

How Long to Measure?

There’s also the issue of how long it will take to know if someone’s productive or not.

Measurable results make sense, but the more frequent the measurement, the more micromanaging is being done, which constitutes paying two people (the employee and their boss) to ensure the employee’s doing their job. And measuring too infrequently means you not aware of the problems that need fixing. Using application-specific activity would require the aggregation of all the applications
utilized (assuming it was possible to audit activity in the first place), which would take quite some time just to review a specific period time on a specific day. Multiply that review process by numbers of days and numbers of employees and you find this can take far too long.

Regardless of which productivity concern fits your company, you need answers in numbers of *days*, if not sooner. If someone is not doing their job, you want to take immediate steps to correct it. The same is true for someone doing their job incorrectly or inefficiently.

No matter the method, you need a way to gauge productivity within a reasonable timeframe using intelligence that allows you to take action and identify trends.

Then How Should You Measure?

An employee can’t be measured on a single activity or action. They need to be measured on the *entirety* of their work. Depending on the job function, an employee's day is made up of a mixture of corporate, local and Internet-based applications, Internet-based data and resources, email, chat, even social media. You need to be watching each of these individually, as well as the summation of them to determine whether an employee is productive.

Additionally, measuring one employee against a peer group provides perspective as to whether they are spending too little, just enough or too much time performing an activity. Also, viewing the productivity of a group allows you to identify the best practices of your top producers to benchmark your efficiency standards.

Lastly, measurement should be done using a proactive methodology where standards are defined, notifications are sent when employees fall outside those standards and a proper review of activity can be done quickly and efficiently.

Measuring Productivity with User Activity Monitoring

SpectorSoft’s *Spector 360* is a User Activity Monitoring (UAM) solution used by tens of thousands of businesses to measure employee productivity with incredible levels of detail. Spector 360’s UAM uniquely provides productivity metrics, and the specific activity behind the metrics to allow businesses to have the intelligence and context necessary to properly identify productivity issues and address them appropriately.

How It Works

Spector 360 runs on the employee’s Windows or Mac computer, and has the ability to record every logon/logoff, keystroke, application, email, chat, web page, print job, and more, all with the ability to review actions with Screen Playback as if you were sitting at the employee's computer. Being able to run silently, companies can see the natural behavior of employees, allowing for accurate productivity metrics. It also has the ability to record call, text and email activity on BlackBerry devices, although no replay of actions is possible.

Spector 360 aggregates the collected employee activity data and provides several ways to review data. Activity can be reviewed by drilling down based on a specific user or activity type, or through a keyword search, but the most effective way Spector 360 presents the data is within a dashboard, making it a fast and easy task to see exactly what your remote employees are doing.

Figure 1 shows an example of how the aggregated activity data appears within a Spector 360 dashboard. The dashboards are customizable, providing a birds-eye view of your most important aspects of productivity.
Figure 1: Take a birds-eye look at employee activity with the Spector 360 dashboard

Every dashboard can be used to drill down into specific activities which, in turn, can be used to view the corresponding screen captures to replay the employees actions, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Replaying Employee Activity with Spector 360
If you have problem employees and want to know ASAP there’s a productivity issue, Spector 360 can also be configured to alert management when specific keywords or actions occur within a client’s activities, identifying the potential problem, so a proper review of activity can be taken.

Additionally, Spector 360 has both turnkey and custom reporting on any activity collected.

Let’s take a look at a few ways you can measure productivity with Spector 360.

**Measuring Application Use**

Spector 360’s recording of application use is a key part of your productivity measurement arsenal. For every application utilized by an employee, Spector 360 tracks three usage metrics, as shown in Figure 3:

- **Total Time**: This is the amount of time an application was open.
- **Focus Time**: This is the amount of time the application was in the foreground, in front of every other application.
- **Active Time**: This is the amount of time the user interacted with an application via keyboard and mouse.

![Figure 3: Measuring Application Productivity](image)

Why do you need *three* measurements? *Context.*

In Figure 3, Ronnie Stam has the most time in a given application with over 25 hours spent. *But is he actually working?* By looking at his Focus Time (less than 3 hours) and Active Time (less than 2 hours), it’s clear he’s not spending 25 hours working in this application. But don’t stop there.

Notice how you are able to see employee activity in aggregate. This is an important feature. Another aspect of context is the ability to compare one employee to another. You can also see in Figure 3 that Ronnie and Athos are spending the most Active Time, when compared to the other peer employees. It is this context that empowers business with true intelligence about their employee’s actions.

**Measuring Productivity with Email, Chat and Internet Use**

Email, Chat and Internet usage by a remote employee can be either an indicator of a solid day’s work or a complete lack of productivity. That’s why Spector 360 provides not just the ability to review the data, as shown in Figure 4, but also the same drill-down capability to review the specific activity.
And remember, for all three activity types mentioned, you can review the same Total, Focus and Active Time values to provide even more context.

Who Reviews the Data?

Most companies utilizing UAM to measure employee productivity desire to silo the ability to review employee activity. That is, you only want the manager of sales reviewing his or her salespeople’s activities. Spector 360 makes this an easy task allowing you to not only specify which users can be reviewed, but also which activities can be reviewed.

The ROI of Employee Productivity

The easiest way to calculate an Employee Productivity ROI with Spector 360 is to take the simple case of productivity loss due to employees wasting time on the Internet. While this isn’t the only way lack of productivity costs companies money, it is a tangible way to measure at least part of the ROI of a Spector 360 purchase.

Salary.com’s annual “Wasted time on the Internet” survey showed a calculated 2013 average of 39 minutes wasted per day per employee.

Using a more conservative numbers, the ROI chart shown in Figure 5 demonstrates how a 500-employee company, by eliminating just 5 minutes of wasted time per day per employee, can have a positive return on an investment in Spector 360.
Remote employees have more opportunity for distraction, lack of training, and inability to be refocused on task than their in-office counterparts, so companies need to get serious about ways to gain visibility into the activities of their remote employees to gauge productivity. Spector 360 unique provides complete visibility into what remote employees do daily, providing the information and intelligence needed to take action in an appropriate timeframe.