

# Money

## Home truths

**No commute, no office politics, no boss breathing down your neck.** You can even work in your pyjamas. The appeal of working from home is not hard to see. And more than 3.5 million people (or one in eight of the workforce) now do it, an increase of 650,000 since 1997.

Judy Heminsley, author of *Work from Home* (How to Books), loves the independence and flexibility: "I can plan my own day and combine work with domestic commitments. I can start early if I feel like it and sometimes even treat myself to a lie-in."

Phil Flaxton, the chief executive of Work Wise UK, believes that within five years up to half the working population could be working from home, at least part of the time. Certainly, he says, companies are beginning to realise the benefits: "Employers can save £7,500 a year on heating, lighting, rent and car parking for every staff member who works at home, or £9,000 in London." The recession is also having an effect, with many people using their redundancy payouts to set up on their own.

**But it won't suit everybody.** As a freelance journalist, I've been based at home for nearly a decade and although I've clung on to my sanity, at times it's been a close-run thing. I still get restless



and lonely occasionally, but I'm lucky to have a family to grumble to in the evening. A single friend of mine worked from home for a while and nearly lost his marbles.

Coping with isolation is the biggest challenge. How you react depends on your personality. "If you're an extrovert, you might need a strong support network," says Heminsley. "You may do better if you're quieter and more self-sufficient, but you'll still need contact."

Before committing yourself, try it for a few consecutive days to see if you can cope once the novelty has worn off.

**If you go it alone,** you will kiss goodbye to company pension, health cover and paid holidays. But you should be able to claim business expenses against tax and a share of your domestic costs such as heating and lighting. You might need an accountant to help with your tax returns.

Finally, says Heminsley, you shouldn't make it any harder than it needs to be. "Many homeworkers, particularly the self-employed, put a lot of pressure on themselves. You need to give yourself a break sometimes." **Harvey Jones**