

# Telework Trendlines 2009

A Survey Brief by WorldatWork

Data collected by The Dieringer Research Group Inc.

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research



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# Introduction

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**W**hen gasoline prices shot past \$3 in mid-2008 on their way to \$4 per gallon or more in some areas, both employers and employees began looking for relief. Alternatives immediately were explored and implemented. Transit subsidies, carpooling, vanpooling and, of course, telecommuting quickly rose to the surface because of their relative ease of implementation.

But in 2008, telecommuting seemed to be in a different place than it had been before. In the 1980s, 1990s and even in the first part of this decade, the technology required to support remote work seemed to still lag behind the need. The proliferation of high-speed connectivity and the explosion of hand-held devices occurred during the early 2000s and have become a mainstream way of working for many employers and employees. Indeed, history may record someday that the technology required for productive remote working and the urgent need for remote working (due to high fuel prices) converged in 2008. But is there data to support this notion? WorldatWork is pleased to publish *Telework Trendlines 2009*, the latest in a set of longitudinal data collected by The Dieringer Research Group.

## Summary of Findings

- More Americans, and a higher percentage of Americans, telecommuted in 2008.
- Occasional telecommuting is on the rise.
- The most common locations for remote work are home, car and a customer's place of business. Restaurants and libraries are becoming less common locations for telecommuting.
- Many workers not currently telecommuting think some of their job tasks might be suitable for remote work, but they usually are unwilling to give up pay in order to telecommute.
- Today's telecommuters are most often 40-year-old male college graduates in a higher income household.

# Methodology

**B**etween Nov. 6, 2008, and Dec. 2, 2008, a random-digit dialed (RDD) telephone survey was conducted by The Dieringer Research Group with funding from WorldatWork, the Total Rewards Association. Interviews with 1,002 U.S. adults 18 years and older were conducted using computer-generated random-digit telephone lists. The data were weighted to match current population norms for U.S. adults using four weighting factors: age, gender, level of education and U.S. Census region.

Data reported for all U.S. adults (n=1,002) is considered reliable at the 95-percent confidence interval to within +/- 3.1 percent. This sample size allows representative population projections for selected segments of both online and offline U.S. adults 18 years and older. Smaller sub-segments of the sample (with n<1,002), where indicated in the text, do not carry the same confidence intervals and margins of error.

## Definitions Used in This Report and the Survey

- **Telecommute:** To either periodically or regularly perform work for one's employer from home or another remote location.
- **Telework:** To perform all of one's work either from home or another remote location, either for an employer or through self-employment.
- **Employee Telecommuter:** A regular employee (full or part time) who works at home or another remote location at least one day per month during normal business hours.
- **Contract Telecommuter:** An individual who works on a contract basis for an employer or is self-employed, and who works at home or at a remote location at least one day per month during normal business hours.
- **Employed Telecommuters:** Individuals (either employees or contractors) working at home or remotely at least one day per month during normal business hours; the sum of "employee telecommuters" and "contract telecommuters."

# Findings

## Finding 1: More Americans, and a Higher Percentage of Americans, Were Telecommuters in 2008

The number of Americans who worked from home or remotely at least one day per month for their employer (“employee telecommuters”) increased from approximately 12.4 million in 2006 to 17.2 million in 2008, according to the RDD telephone survey research. The rise in the number of telecommuters represents a two-year increase of 39 percent, and an increase of 74 percent since 2005. In 2005, the number of employees allowed to work from home or remotely at least one day per month by their employer was approximately 9.9 million. (See Figure 1.)

FIGURE 1: Telecommuter Trendline

“Employee telecommuter” is a full- or part-time employee who works remotely at least one day per month. A “contract telecommuter” is a self-employed individual who works remotely at least one day per month. Data for 2007 are estimates only; the survey was not conducted in 2007.



Using data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimates, the percentage of Americans who telecommute or work remotely at least once per month also has increased between 2006 and 2008. In 2006, approximately 8 percent of Americans telecommuted at least one day per month; in 2008, that figure rose to just over 11 percent.

This trend toward more telecommuting likely is due to a combination of factors, including:

- The proliferation of high-speed and wireless Internet access (which has made it both less expensive and more productive to work remotely)
- Rising fuel and commuting costs, and
- The trend by employers to embrace work-life balance concepts.

The 2008 survey also found that the number of employees who work on contract, are self-employed or are business owners (“contract telecommuters”) who work at home or remotely at least one day per month rose only slightly, from approximately 16.2 million Americans in 2006 to 16.6 million Americans in 2008.

The simple sum of employee telecommuters and contract telecommuters who work remotely at least one day per month rose from approximately 28.7 million Americans in 2006 to 33.7 million in 2008, a 17-percent two-year increase. In the five-year period since 2003, the total number of once-a-month telecommuters in the United States has risen by 43 percent, from 23.5 million to 33.7 million Americans.

## Finding 2: Occasional Telecommuting Is on the Rise

In 2008, as the total number of telecommuters has risen, the percentage that work remotely “almost every day” has dropped, as has the percentage of telecommuters who indicate they work remotely at least one day per week. (See Figure 2 on page 6.)

This suggests that “ad hoc” or occasional telecommuting

FIGURE 2: Frequency of Telecommuting

"Employed Telecommuters" Only	2006 (n=140)	Number of U.S. Adults (2006)	2008 (n=130)	Number of U.S. Adults (2008)
At least once per month	100%	28.7 million	100%	33.7 million
At least one day per week	77%	22.0 million	72%	24.2 million
Almost every day	51%	14.7 million	40%	13.5 million

Percentages are based on weighted data, while sample sizes shown ("n") reflect the actual number of respondents.

FIGURE 3: Locations Where Work Was Conducted During the Past Month

Location	2006 (n=140)	2008 (n=130)
Home	76%	87%
Customer/client's place of business	28%	41%
In the car	38%	37%
Café or restaurant	31%	23%
Hotel or motel	26%	26%
Park or other outdoor location	19%	14%
On airplane, train or subway	13%	21%
Airport, train depot or subway platform	16%	23%
Library	16%	10%
Employer's satellite location	3%	7%
Telework center (not their employer's)	5%	8%
None of the above	12%	4%
While on vacation	18%	23%

Percentages are based on weighted data, while sample sizes shown ("n") reflect the actual number of respondents.

has risen in the two years since the previous survey, possibly reflecting the added work-location flexibility inherent in the spread of high-speed Internet access and proliferation of hand-held technologies. See Finding 3 for more on this topic.

### Finding 3: The Most Common Locations for Telecommuting Are Home, Car and a Customer's Place of Business

In the 2008 survey, as with the 2006 version, respondents were offered a question that included a variety of

location choices from which they might have conducted work during the prior month. Figure 3 shows the common categories indicated.

Although "home" maintained its position at the top of the list of common locations for telecommuters to conduct their work in 2008, a higher percentage of respondents said they work from home. In 2006, roughly three out of four said they telecommuted from home; in 2008, that percentile jumped to nearly nine out of 10 (87 percent).

Another category on the rise during the two-year period was "customer or client's place of business," which rose more than 10 percent, to 41 percent.

A smaller rise was recorded for the two categories “airplane, train or subway” and “airport, train depot or subway platform.”

Decreases were recorded in several categories: “café or restaurant,” “park or other outdoor location” and “library.”

(Note: Because this data is for those who self reported as telecommuters only rather than all U.S. adults, the margin of error for this question is +/- 8.6 percent.)

#### **Finding 4: Many Workers Not Currently Telecommuting Think Some of Their Job Tasks Might Be Suitable for Remote Work, But They Are Usually Unwilling to Give Up Pay to Telecommute**

Responding to a new series of questions that were added to the survey in 2008, 38 percent of respondents who reported they were not currently telecommuting said they had job-related tasks that they thought they could perform from home. Conversely, 61 percent of those not currently telecommuting said they did not have job tasks that could be performed remotely. (See Figure 4.)

Among the subset of those who thought some of their job could be performed remotely, the most common answer was “less than 40 percent” of their job could be performed at home. However, 24 percent of respondents reported a belief that 80 percent or more of their job could be performed at home. (See Figure 5.)

When asked how interested they were in potentially doing some or all of the tasks that could be performed remotely from home if their employer agreed, a combined 50 percent answered in one of the top two boxes corresponding to “more” interested. Twenty-one percent said they were “not at all interested” in working remotely or from home. (See Figure 6.)

When further asked whether they thought their employer would be willing to allow them to work at home at least some of the time, a 54-percent majority said yes. (See Figure 7 on page 8.)

But when the subject of pay or compensation was injected into the questionnaire, a stronger 61-percent majority said they would not be willing to be paid slightly less by their employer in exchange for being allowed to telecommute two days per week. (See Figure 8 on page 8.)

**FIGURE 4: Job-Related Tasks That Could Be Performed at Home**

“Do you have any job-related tasks that you could perform at home?” (n=273 who reported not currently telecommuting)

Yes	38%
No	61%
Don't know	1%

Percentages are based on weighted data, while sample sizes shown (“n”) reflect the actual number of respondents.

**FIGURE 5: Percent of Job That Could Be Performed at Home**

“What percent of your job do you think could be performed at home?” (n=113; not currently telecommuting but think they have tasks that could be performed at home)

Less than 20%	29%
20%-40%	27%
40%-60%	11%
60%-80%	9%
80% or more	24%
Don't know	1%

Percentages are based on weighted data, while sample sizes shown (“n”) reflect the actual number of respondents.

**FIGURE 6: Interest in Performing Some or All Tasks from Home**

“Please rate how interested you are in doing some or all of those tasks at home if your employer agreed to allow you ...” (n=113; not currently telecommuting but think they have tasks that could be performed at home)

5 (Very interested)	34%
4	16%
3	6%
2	22%
1 (Not at all interested)	21%
Don't know	2%

Percentages are based on weighted data, while sample sizes shown (“n”) reflect the actual number of respondents.

**FIGURE 7: Belief About Employer's Willingness to Allow Working from Home**

"Do you think your employer is willing to allow you to work at home at least some of the time?" (n=113; not currently telecommuting but think they have tasks that could be performed at home)

Yes	54%
No	44%
Don't know	3%

Percentages are based on weighted data, while sample sizes shown ("n") reflect the actual number of respondents.

**FIGURE 8: Willingness to Forego Pay in Exchange for Telecommuting**

"Would you be willing to be paid slightly less by your employer in exchange for being allowed to telecommute two days per week?" (n=113; not currently telecommuting but think they have tasks that could be performed at home)

Yes	35%
No	61%
Don't know	4%

Percentages are based on weighted data, while sample sizes shown ("n") reflect the actual number of respondents.

### Finding 5: Today's Telecommuters Are Most Often 40-Year-Old Male College Graduates in a Higher Income Household

The 2008 survey provides a snapshot of information about the demographic profile of those who are telecommuting today. Figure 9 provides a selective sample of the profile data from those identifying themselves as "employed telecommuters" who work at least one day a month from home or remotely during the year.

The data in Figure 9 illustrate that most telecommuters in 2008 were:

- Male
- Under age 55 (most around 40 years old)
- College graduates
- Living in a household earning \$75,000 or more per year.

**FIGURE 9: Profile of a Telecommuter, 2006 and 2008**

	2006 (n=140)	2008 (n=130)
<b>Number of "employed telecommuters," U.S.</b>	28.7 million	33.7 million
<b>Gender</b>		
Men	53%	61%
Women	47%	39%
<b>Age</b>		
18-34	38%	42%
35-54	52%	48%
55+	11%	8%
Mean age	41.0	40.3
Median age	40.0	38.0
<b>Educational Attainment</b>		
High School or Less	18%	23%
Some College/Vocational	25%	28%
College Graduate	57%	50%
Post Graduate Degree	22%	15%
<b>Household Income</b>		
Under \$40,000	20%	10%
\$40,000 - <\$75,000	26%	32%
\$75,000 or more	37%	52%
Refused	17%	5%

(Note: Because this data is for those who self-reported as telecommuters only, and not all U.S. adults, the margin of error for this question is +/- 8.6%.)

## About This Report

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The data reported here were commissioned by WorldatWork and collected by The Dieringer Research Group Inc. Any data or tables taken from this summary for other purposes should be referenced as “WorldatWork Telework Trendlines 2009, data from The Dieringer Research Group Inc.”

Customized analysis of these data, along with comparison to previous years, can be commissioned from The Dieringer Research Group Inc. For more information, please contact 888-432-5220. Members of the press should contact Marcia Rhodes, media relations manager for WorldatWork, at [marcia.rhodes@worldatwork.org](mailto:marcia.rhodes@worldatwork.org), or 480-304-6885.

The Dieringer Research Group Inc. has been involved in tracking telework since conducting the first nationally recognized survey of the trend in 1985. Since 2003, WorldatWork and The Dieringer Research Group Inc. have collaborated to collect and provide the latest data on people working from anywhere, also known as teleworkers. The survey has evolved as the topic of remote work has. For instance, some refinements were made to the survey instrument in 2008 to better capture the proliferation of wireless, hand-held devices and remote access.

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