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Virtual Office Strategies for Overseas Travel

I'm a solo practitioner -- and I mean solo. I don't have a secretary. I'm traveling to Scotland for a couple of weeks and I need to be able to access my e-mail and voice mail while I'm away. I own a laptop and I'm shopping for a cellular telephone.

What are the best methods for inexpensively retrieving e-mails and checking voice mail while I'm out of town?

Jeffrey W. Frazier, Roswell, Georgia

Consider forwarding all your email to a free account such as Hotmail, Gmail or Yahooemail. As to voice mail, I don't know what you use for a voice mail service so it's hard to respond. Sometimes just dialing up the office the old fashioned way works easier than fancy solutions. There are services which will "capture" your voice mail and turn it into an audio email.

Bruce Dorner, Londonderry, New Hampshire

As for emails, check and see if you can get forward your existing email account to one of the free accounts with Yahoo or GMail. Those are accessible with a browser, so they can be checked anywhere you have internet access.

Voice mail may require calling in to your number. I don't know how you have your voicemail set up...some answering machines have the capability to call a phone number, and then you can access your voice mail that way...that can get to be expensive what with overseas calling however.

Tom Simchak, Houston, Texas

The NSA has a special free promotional offer on this. '-)

James S. Tyre, Culver City, California

If you're taking your laptop with you... Until the end of the year, all calls to the US or Canada are free through Skype. All you have to do is log-in and then you can call back home, ie your voicemail, etc. through your computer (connected to the internet/I'm sure there are plenty of 'hot-spots' where ever you go) The service works great. You can get more info at www.skype.com



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As far as e-mail, the suggestions to use a free account are fine; if your laptop is with you though, depending on how it's set-up, it should work the same anywhere you are.

If you don't have a cell phone yet, you could get one here, or buy one overseas, and make sure it's an unlocked tri or quad band GSM (i.e., Motorola V3), then you can just switch out sim cards when you travel, so you can use your cell anywhere you go, and even have local numbers. (you can buy cards overseas for like pay-as-you-go, and depending on area, they are pretty cheap compared to US rates, both domestic and int'l) Both Cingular and T-Mobile are GSM operators here in the U.S.

Ryan Lee Berman, Michigan

Email is easy - find out how to check you account on line. You may be able to do so already through www.mail2web.com. Either take a laptop or use local internet stores - they are common in most of the world. If you use a store, then delete the junk and leave the good stuff, unless you are receiving so much you will exceed the capacity of your email account. If you have a laptop, download the good stuff. When you reply to someone, send yourself a bcc to make sure you capture the reply. When you get home, download everything into your regular email system. Be sure you turn off all your listservs while you're gone, to cut down on volume. If you just can't leave them, access them online rather than as emails.

Voice mail has assorted options, depending on whether you will have the ability to set up a Skype account, or need to get a cell phone for the purpose.

Rebecca Wiess

J2 will receive fax and voice messages, and forward them as email. You can have them forwarded to 2 email accounts.

Forward your office lines to j2. Forward all your email to any easily accessible server--that could be a server you now use, or Gmail, or many others. If you want a back up you can allow your office computer to download a copy and leave the email on the server. Lots of combinations are possible, depending on your volume and priorities.

Then access/download email from anyplace in world where you can connect to net.

John Page, Florida

I'm also a solo without a secretary (although I often have a law clerk) and I go to France for work several times a year. I use my colleagues' ethernet set-up when I am there and just do dial up otherwise. You have to have

the right plugs. It works and I don't spend a lot of time on-line. It's not outrageously expensive that way. I also call in for my voice mails. I have a Cingular Treo 650, which allows me to call from anywhere in the world. Again, I spend very little time on the phone so the cost is not too bad. Using my Treo was cheaper than a cell phone with an unlocked SIMM where I could buy local service. For the little I use my phone, it was cheaper to merely call long distance. I have my fax machine programmed to send emails to my computer via the internet. The only problem I have is for my mail; that is the reason I always try to have a law clerk or ask a reliable neighbor. I also let opposing counsel know when I will be gone and that they not schedule anything during that time period. That generally works. I figure that most judges would be outraged to learn that someone set up a hearing knowing that I would be out of the country.

Lynne R. Ostfeld, Chicago, Illinois

When I used to spend most of my time in Hamburg, Germany, I used a dial up connection there which cost me less than 1 penny per minute. This was a connection without contract or commitment, and so quite convenient to use. I am not sure if such a connection is available in Scotland, but there should be sites to check this. I still remember the cheap phone rate and thought it so funny that it cost me less to call clients from overseas than it did from my NYC office:))

Alan P. Bernstein

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