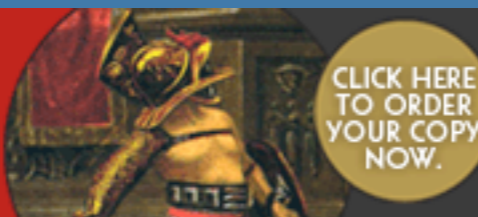


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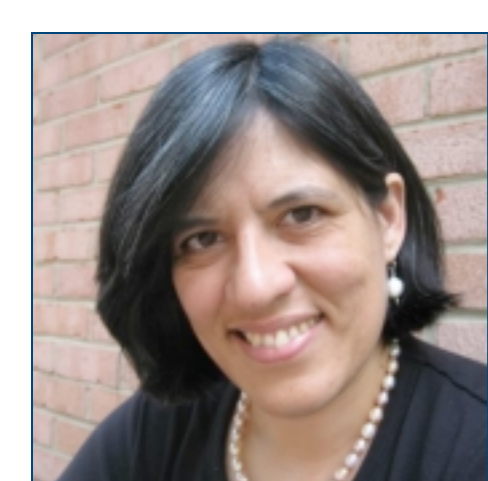
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Time
Tripping Over Wireless

Joan Indiana Rigdon, 05.13.09, 12:00 PM EDT

Sometimes work gets done in the most unlikely of places.



When my husband and I bought our house a little more than seven years ago, I had certain fantasies about my new home office. It would be a sanctuary, I decided, in its own room with a closing door, as opposed to the corner of the dining room, where it had lived in our previous two apartments. It would have a nice desk, a good chair, plenty of room for books and files and a general aura of productivity.

Some of these things came true. I did give my office its own bedroom. I also painted it, refinished its floors and furnished it with a desk and bookcase.

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For the first few years, I even used it.

I won't mislead you by claiming that I ever reported to it, leaving only for lunch and coffee breaks, as some of the work-from-home crowd insist they do. But I did go in, and once seated, when I wasn't wasting time on the Internet or waving to my neighbors, who seemed to spend their entire days parading outside my window with dogs and babies in tow, I produced. In my office, just like I had planned.

Then about four years ago, I bought a laptop and had my husband install a wireless router. And that is what killed my home office.

Suddenly, I could work from the dining table, over the full breakfast I didn't get while rushing the kids to school. Or from the couch, with its view of the patio, or even from the patio itself.

Within days, I had abandoned my office for these various venues. On the plus side, I stopped wasting time on the Internet. Instead, I found myself drifting from work to emptying the dishwasher, or removing toys from underfoot, or clumps of clover from flowerbeds. Then I'd return to my keyboard, only to wonder if I shouldn't take one more walk around the garden to check on the rain barrel or the new eggs that had appeared in our birdhouse.

I tried to bring things under control. The problem is, once I went wireless, I couldn't imagine tethering myself to any office, even the one I'd designed down the hall. So instead, I moved my work to a different room, where I was sure I could concentrate: my bedroom.

At first, I only worked in bed in the wee hours, on deadline. But soon, it became a daytime habit. To this day, after dropping the kids at school, I throw a large pillow against the headboard climb in, fire up my laptop, make sure my cordless home phone and cellphone are handy, and work. I do research, I send emails, I make phone calls, I write, I edit, I proof galleyes ... all from the comfort of my ... um ... bed.

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This being the digital age, I don't drag much paperwork into bed with me, but occasionally a 150-page Supreme Court opinion will find its way onto my husband's pillow, alongside the laundry I thought to take out of the dryer but didn't get around to folding.

This makes it difficult for my husband to collapse at the end of the night. "Maybe we should put a bed in your office," he says about once a week, as he pushes my laptop aside. I apologize and he keeps teasing. "Don't apologize. You've made a lot of money in this bed."

Which is true, I suppose. But still, I do feel guilty, so I make periodic efforts to migrate back into my office.

About two years ago I repainted, replaced the folding table with a nice desk and added a few walls of shelves, an actual swivel chair and a nice thick rug. I even set up a few breakable decorations that my husband and I had packed away when our first child was born.

It worked for a few weeks. The problem is, no swivel chair, at least not one I can afford, will ever match the comfort of my bed, especially if it's cold.

The other problem is, once the forsythia pop, I find it harder and harder to keep my laptop inside. Last year was the worst because in addition to a larger garden, we built a new tree house that kept beckoning for more coats of camouflaging paint, to cover the obscenely bright primer I feared would spark a neighborhood riot.

So when I wasn't watering, I was applying extra coats between interviews, and trying to sound professional while answering my cellphone from my little patch of woods, paintbrush in hand. Did anyone notice the crunching sound on my end of the line as I trampled through vines on my way back to the patio where my laptop waited? I hope not and, at any rate, it didn't happen often.

I'm still getting my work done. I'm just not getting it done in the place I expected. And if you ever work with wireless from home, I bet you don't either.

Joan Indiana Rigdon is a freelance writer based near Washington, D.C. When she's not painting her treehouse, she covers national policy and management issues for various publications.

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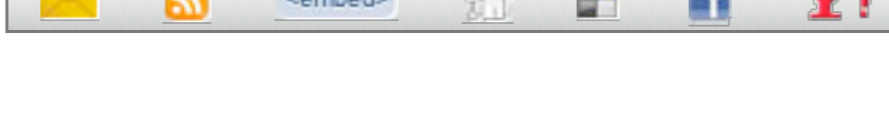
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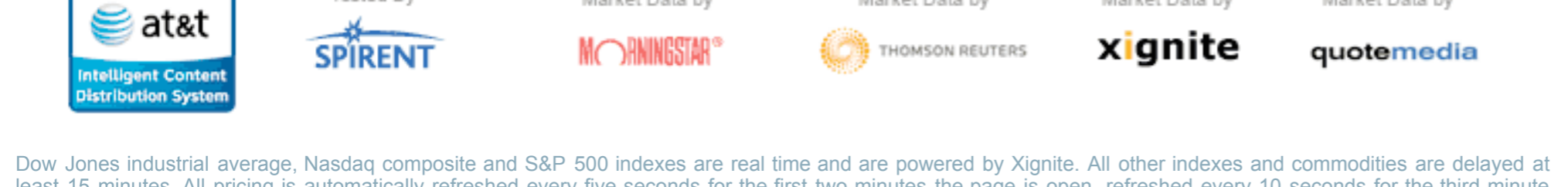
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