

## Top 5 remote working applications

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With the UK currently stumbling to a halt due to snow I've been working from home. I like working from home, it has many advantages like the time saved in commuting, and the fact that you usually know your own hardware/software setup better than works.

One thing it has highlighted is that as a software developer your actual location is now totally irrelevant. Even for team based projects you do not all have to be in the same physical location. Our physical and online worlds have become so enmeshed that is it now common place to be able to work productively from anywhere.

So with that in mind I thought I'd do a quick round up of my favourite remote working applications. Some are more "best practices" with recommendations if I've been using a specific product. Warning: all recommendations may contain nuts.

### 1. Online Code / Asset Source Control

Having your code in an online repository is an absolute life saver. Not only does this contribute towards a "Business continuity" plan for regular working, but it means you can get to it from anywhere. We should all be using source control anyway, but having it online means that it's much more easily maintained and you are not moving code around on USB keys.

I use an application called Beanstalk. [www.beanstalkapp.com](http://www.beanstalkapp.com) . They have worked well for me so far, and the basic account is free.

### 2. Virtualisation

The Virtual PC software market has moved on considerably in the last few years. To the point now where there are free versions of virtualisation software that allows you to create virtual pc's inside your actual physical

pc. I use this at work and at home for a few reasons. Firstly I don't even have a physical development server anymore, it is a virtual windows 2003 server, and secondly this is great for setting up specific testing environments. Need a windows XP running Internet Explorer 6? Create a new virtual image and install XP, it is far more reliable than multiple IE's or other Internet Explorer emulation software.

I use VM ware server 2.0, its totally free (Virtual pc's operating system licences aren't so be careful) you can get it here: <http://www.vmware.com/products/server/>

### **3. Instant messaging / Skype**

Communication in any team is important, especially so if you are working remotely. If no-one can contact you then appearances may be that you aren't working at all, which is bad news. I use Skype <http://www.skype.com/intl/en-gb/> which can be used for chat and messaging.

The obvious benefits are that it is free, and means you can have team discussions online. More recently I've encountered several companies that actually use Skype as their main communications tool. They don't even have desktop phones anymore.

### **4. FTP clients / File synchronisation utilities**

Ideally you can still provide any of your in-office functionality at your remote location. So being able to implement change releases is essential. I use a combination of Filezilla <http://filezilla-project.org/> which is a free FTP client, and Beyond Compare <http://www.scootersoftware.com/> which is a file comparison tool. Ideally I'd like to learn ANT, but just haven't got round to it yet.

### **5. Online file storage**

Services like DropBox <https://www.dropbox.com/> are invaluable for the online storage of files. We always have online briefs, and Photoshop designs flying around the place, so storing them in one central online location is an ideal way of ensuring that you always have the latest

version. It also avoids the problem of not having the project spec, and not being able to work.

I personally use Google Docs for this <http://www.google.com/docs>. I've found it to be a very flexible easily maintained way of storing pretty much any format of document.