With over 24 million Americans working from home, either part-time or full-time, a person's house has to be more than a castle—it has to be a place to get things done.

Whether you're telecommuting to a job or running a business out of your house, you'll need more than a desk, a phone and the discipline to buckle down and keep away from the TV.

To get the most out of working from home—without slacking off or becoming a workaholic who never sees the family—you'll need to get organized and equipped with the right communications technology.

"Communications technology is the bedrock to make it easy to manage information and communicate within a company and with customers," says William Stofega, an IDC technology analyst who specializes in issues relating to small businesses.

Home workers need many of the same technologies as large businesses—like phones, mobile devices and instant messaging—but they need them to be simpler.

"They want solutions, not just products. They need technology to solve problems to free up time for dinner with the family," says Bill Taylor, Vice President of Panasonic's Communications Solutions Group.

Here are some tips on making working from home more productive:

—Separate work from home life. Establish a private space for a properly-furnished home office where you can close the door. Separation is about more than physical space, however.

Create a work schedule and stick to it, making sure to keep channels of communication open to your boss or customers, and always hit deadlines. Be sure your schedule has an end time

where you switch back to “home and family mode.”

—Make rugged choices. Just as you wouldn’t choose a rickety desk, select equipment that stands up to hard work. Choose business-class computers and phones that are optimized for small or medium-sized businesses.

For instance, Panasonic has a new line of Multi-Cell DECT 6.0 telephones that include models with ruggedized handsets that are resistant to drops and coffee spills. Go for the optional headset to communicate hands-free so you can multitask while talking.

—Limit distractions. The kids, pets, TV and even the phone, email and your refrigerator all can be distractions. Don’t get sidetracked. Some home workers find it easiest to schedule lunchtime, break times and even set aside specific times to make phone calls or answer emails. Figure out what works best for you.

—Rely on technology to make life easier. Today’s technology can help you communicate and collaborate efficiently with colleagues or customers. If you telecommute to work, find out if your calls can be routed to your home phone or even your computer and how to transfer calls between your home and your colleagues.

If your company uses a system such as Panasonic’s new KX-NCP500 or NCP1000 Network Communications Platform, you can have your work calls follow you to your home or mobile phone, making your house sound like part of the bigger enterprise. Such technology provides flexibility and growth, allowing you to connect speakerphones or network cameras for videoconferencing.

For more tips on new home office technology, visit panasonic.com/ncp.

“One out of every two workers is either operating a small business or employed by one,” points out Taylor. “Working from home is particularly attractive to many of these companies, but it’s all about staying well connected.”