Suntan cream, bikini, shades…laptop computer

Working holidays the norm as Brits love emailing from the beach...but show a lack of trust of colleagues back at home

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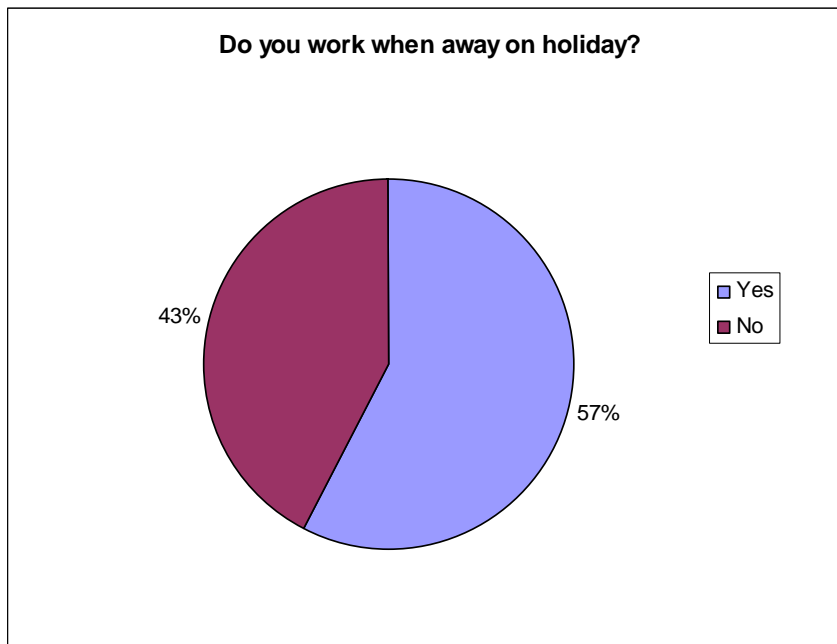connecting business people

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Introduction

In June 2005, Microsoft surveyed more than 750 members of the Ecademy (www.edcademy.com), an international online business network, to establish the propensity for and attitude towards working while on holiday. The survey formed part of Tomorrow's Work, Microsoft's long-term initiative to explore how UK citizens will behave, work and succeed in their professional environments in the information age.

The survey results were startling. While the expectation was that some people would use modern mobile technologies to make themselves available to colleagues while on holiday, the levels of holiday work and relative lack of negative feeling towards it came as a surprise….

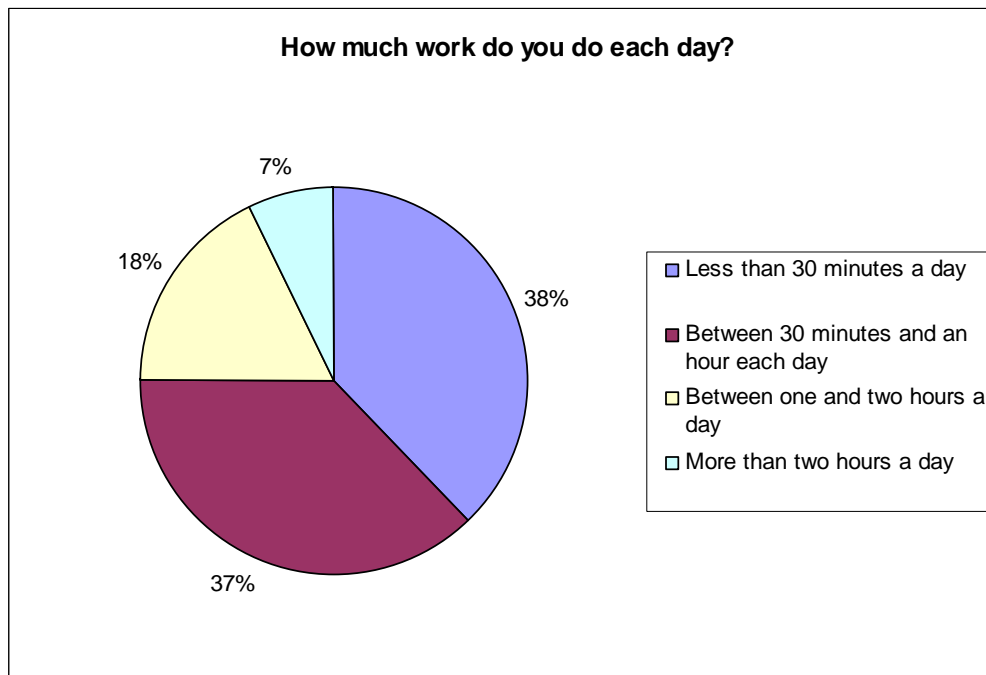# Holiday work becoming the norm….

Of all respondents to the survey, more than half (57%) said that they do work while on holiday.

Do you work when away on holiday?

43%

57%

Yes
No

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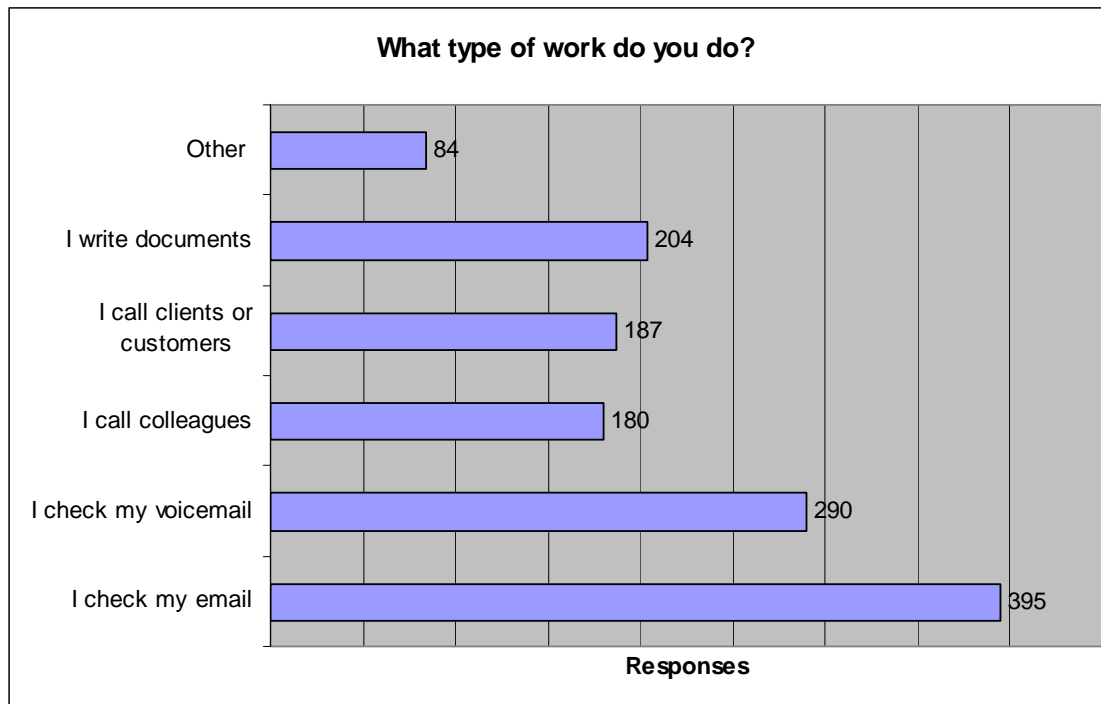connecting business people

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How much holiday work?

Of those that work while away on holiday, the majority do up to an hour's work a day, though a quarter admit to doing more than an hour every day of their holiday.

How much work do you do each day?

- Less than 30 minutes a day
- Between 30 minutes and an hour each day
- Between one and two hours a day
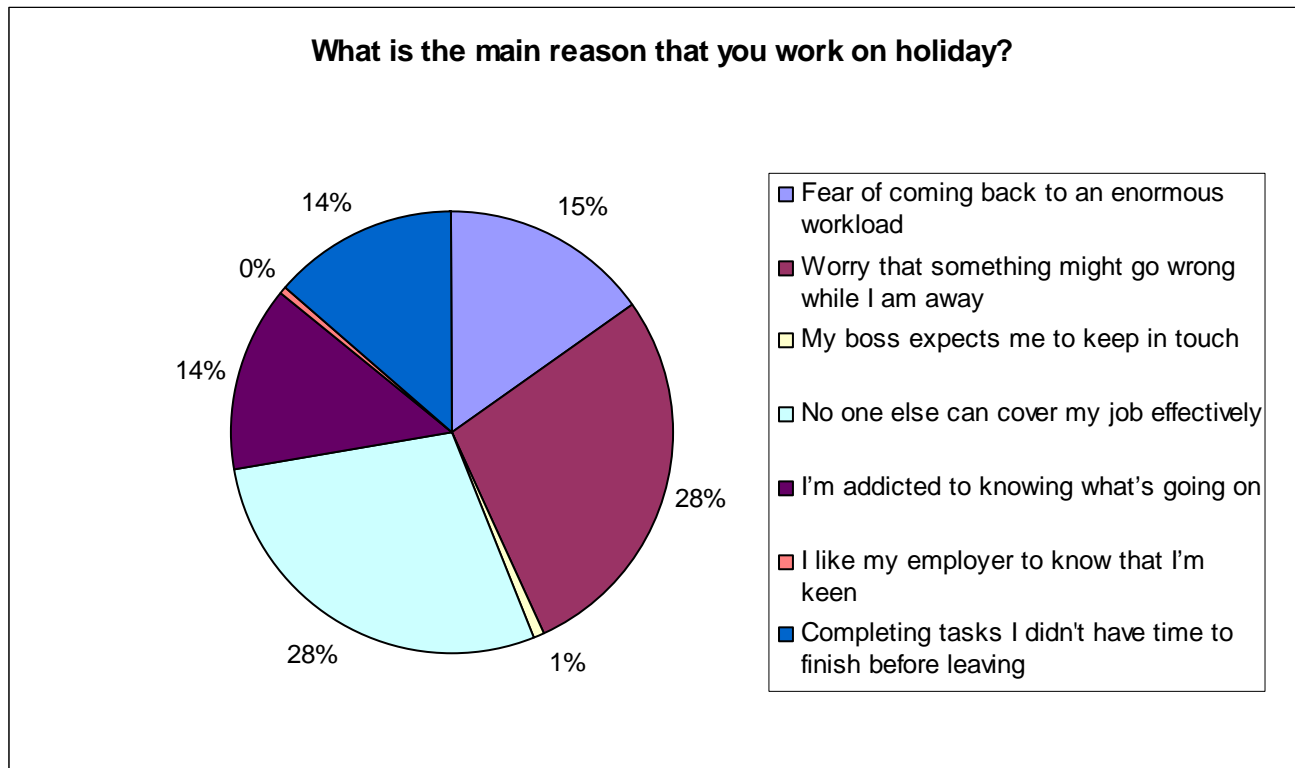- More than two hours a day

Checking the mail

Perhaps surprisingly, the most common work undertaken on holiday was the checking of email (by 89% of people who admitted working on holiday), followed by the checking of voicemail (65%) and the calling of clients or customers (42%) and calling of colleagues (41%).

What type of work do you do?

Category	Responses
Other	84
I write documents	204
I call clients or customers	187
I call colleagues	180
I check my voicemail	290
I check my email	395

Responses

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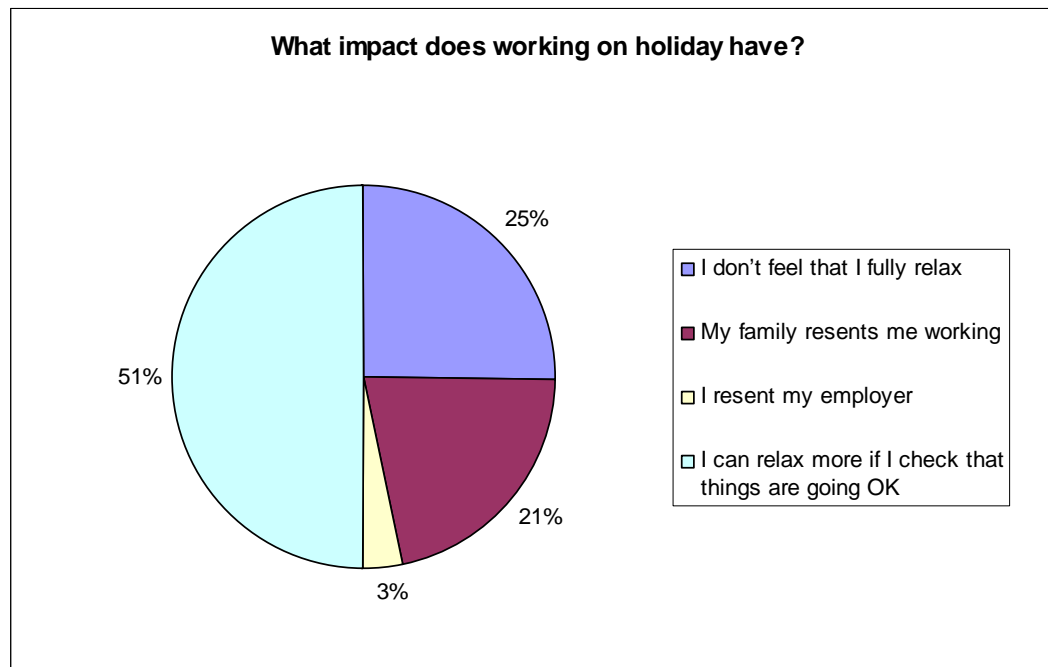connecting business people

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Worries and mistrust

The main reasons given for working while on holiday were worrying. The two main reasons – each cited by 28% of respondents – were a worry that something might go wrong while they were away and the fact that they felt nobody else could effectively cover their job.

What is the main reason that you work on holiday?

- 14%
- 15%
- 0%
- 14%
- 28%
- 28%
- 1%

- ■ Fear of coming back to an enormous workload
- ■ Worry that something might go wrong while I am away
- □ My boss expects me to keep in touch
- □ No one else can cover my job effectively
- ■ I'm addicted to knowing what's going on
- □ I like my employer to know that I'm keen
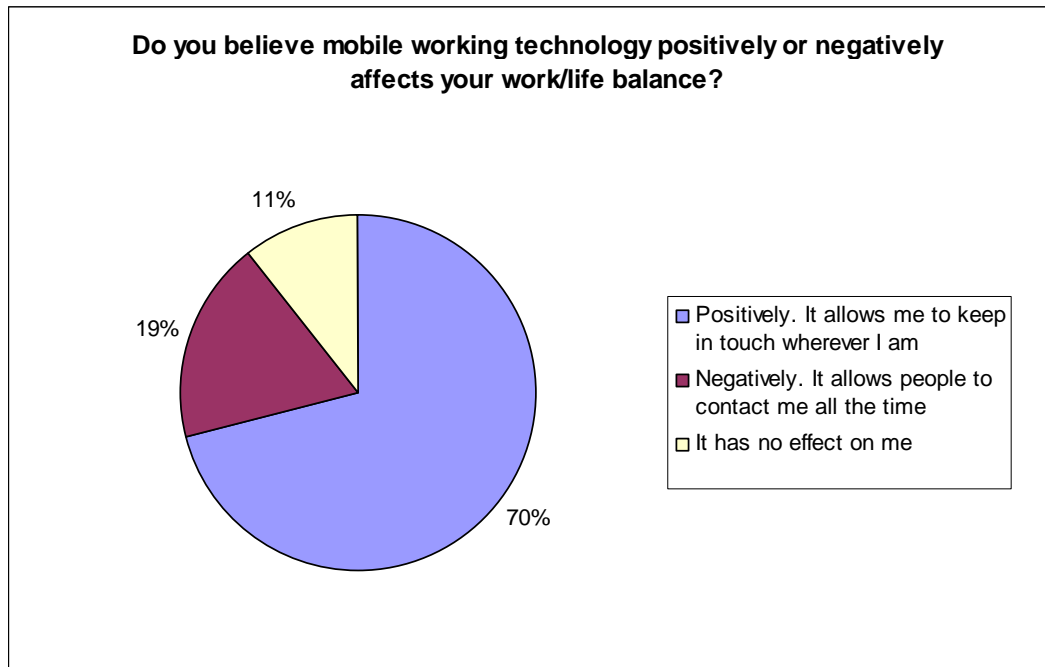- ■ Completing tasks I didn't have time to finish before leaving

The impact

Perhaps most startling of all was the lack of resentment people felt towards having to work while on holiday, with the majority (51%) claiming that they could relax more if they checked that everything was going OK back in the office. However a quarter felt that they couldn't relax fully if they had to work on holiday, and one in five felt family resentment towards them having to work.

What impact does working on holiday have?

- 25%
- 21%
- 3%
- 51%

Legend:
- ■ I don't feel that I fully relax
- ■ My family resents me working
- □ I resent my employer
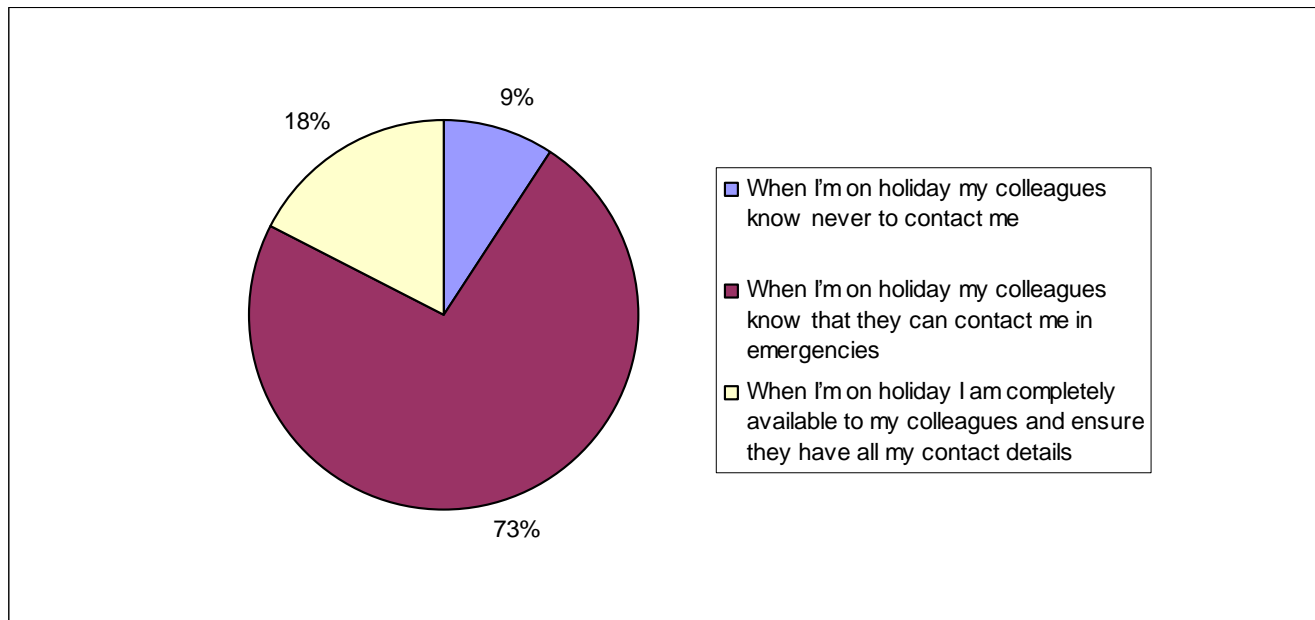- □ I can relax more if I check that things are going OK

Extra hand baggage

In terms of the technology people choose to take with them on holiday, 92% taking a mobile telephone with them is no surprise. However, more than a third of people (37%) also take a laptop computer with them on their holiday. However, respondents felt overwhelmingly positive about the impact of mobile working technologies.

Do you believe mobile working technology positively or negatively affects your work/life balance?

- 11%
- 19%
- 70%

- ■ Positively. It allows me to keep in touch wherever I am
- ■ Negatively. It allows people to contact me all the time
- □ It has no effect on me

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Making a rod for our own backs

Fewer than one in five respondents (18%) said that while they were on holiday, they were completely unavailable to colleagues. To a greater or lesser extent, the vast majority made themselves contactable.

9%

18%

- ☐ When I'm on holiday my colleagues know never to contact me

- ☐ When I'm on holiday my colleagues know that they can contact me in emergencies
- ☐ When I'm on holiday I am completely available to my colleagues and ensure they have all my contact details

73%

Conclusion

Clearly, more and more professionals are working while on holiday; traditionally a time to relax and recharge the batteries. This has worrying implications for long-term productivity and employee morale, despite the seeming lack of resentment from respondents.

The reasons given for having to work on holiday point to a worrying lack of trust in colleagues, tied to an apparent inability to plan and effectively delegate tasks prior to leaving the office.

Mobile working technologies are positively viewed. However, if people are to strike a good work/life balance, they must ensure that they stay in control of the technology, rather than letting the technology control them.