

PROPERTY OFFICE PODS

Step out and log on

A backyard workspace helps keep household distractions at bay, writes **Lisa Carapiet**.

The launch of a federal government campaign to get more Australians to work from home means that labouring on a laptop in the living room doesn't cut it any more.

As part of the national digital economy strategy, the government wants to double the number of "teleworkers" to 12 per cent by 2020.

Reduced commuting time and reportedly higher levels of productivity come with working from home, but there are also plenty of distractions.

One way to stay focused and maintain productivity is to work in a backyard office: a quiet, purpose-built space where you can concentrate on the tasks at hand. It's at home but not in the house – a necessary boundary.

"One of the major concerns about working from home is the potential for a blurring of the work/life boundary," says Catherine Raffaele, a senior research analyst at the University of Sydney's Workplace Research Centre.

"Having a distinctly separate workspace can help create psychological boundaries between work and home life, not just for the worker but also for others who share the home."

Architect Craig Chatman owns Melbourne-based group Arkit,

which develops sustainable prefabricated buildings.

"We are designing a 15 square metre stand-alone office for an IT executive in Toorak," he says. "He prefers the escapism and the thinking space a detached prefab office provides, separate to his primary residence."

Built from timber, the smaller prefab offices can be delivered complete. Larger ones come in a "flat pack" and are assembled on site. Prices start from \$25,000 for a small 10 sq m space, which is a snug fit for two people.

Electricity is essential and solar power can be installed as an extra. Running water is also a straight-forward installation but a toilet costs a little extra as it must be connected to the sewer.

Another company in the business of backyard offices, UK-based OfficePOD is aiming to market and distribute its product in Australia in 2013.

"We are looking at establishing manufacturing and supply chain capacity in the region, after we have the UK business bedded down," managing director Stephen Tanner says.

He is seeking to offer the standard OfficePOD for about \$15,000 plus tax and installation.

The pods are in component form and are built on site in just one day. They include an integral



A backyard business pod by British company OfficePOD, left; a prefab home office by Melbourne-based group Arkit, below.

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Catherine Raffaele
University of Sydney



desk and storage, lighting, power, ventilation and heating.

Designed with curved corners, the pod feels less like a box and more like a place to escape.

"They're very popular," Tanner says. "We get enquiries from all over the world every day and many of those are from Australia."

"But our challenge, and the

next phase of the business, is to increase production numbers and reduce the cost of each unit."

Tanner says he is constantly working on designs and improvements to the existing model and adds that the company is even working on a "micro-home" version of the pod.

For those concerned about their carbon footprint, the

OfficePOD produces 63 per cent less carbon dioxide per employee than a standard office.

Chatman says the cost of a home extension is comparable to the cost of buying an Arkit prefab office, but getting a stand-alone workspace in the backyard is a far quicker process than knocking down walls and waiting for tradesmen.