Virtual Companies Outperform Conventional Companies

White Paper

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Introduction

The term virtual company means an organization that does not have a physical setting like corporate headquarters or offices. Instead, a combination of technology and culture create the business establishment. In the press, some call this setup remote-only, remote-first, working from anywhere (WFA), or the officeless workplace. Seeq's working definition is:

> *A business entity without offices that exploits technology for bringing employees and partners together as its standard operating procedure.*

Throughout this paper, we use the terms business, company, corporation, and organization as general references to business entities. In this context, the legal nuances of what business type it is, such as not-for-profit, for-profit, LLC, or partnership, do not apply. The principles we discuss, however, pertain to a broad range of organizations.

> "Starting up, I was one of the last of the founding partners to really believe in virtual companies. I thought it was going to be a temporary setup, but I've been won over."
>
> — Steve Sliwa, Seeq CEO

Seeq's Observations

We find that virtual offices excel for technologies with knowledge workers in the fields of software, IT, services, and consulting that do not require collocation with hardware testing or production. If the work involves touching physical equipment, then employees cannot always be at an external locale. Completely officeless environments without facilities would be detrimental to business productivity. Remote-first, work from home (WFH), or heavy-remote settings might provide some flexibility and an opportunity to explore the benefits of such an arrangement.

If your organization relies on knowledge workers without hardware constraints, what is the best way to build a company? Seeq believes virtual companies, when implemented correctly, are superior to conventional business entities organized around physical locations.

When most people join Seeq, they are not sure how the virtual environment works and how it will play out. Even our CEO, Steve Sliwa, had reservations in the beginning. He began by looking for office space, but now, he is a firm believer in no longer having a physical location.

We see more and more companies exploiting this trend, including GitLab, Zapier, and Automattic. Each of these businesses has written extensively about how this new paradigm is critical to their success, and many of their best practices overlap with Seeq's. In Remote Only, Zapier's Manifesto succinctly states the fundamentals of virtual organizations.

We have also discovered that our employees, in general, have a hard time imagining going back to conventional arrangements. We want to share what we have learned and how this approach provides Seeq with a significant competitive advantage.

Manifesto

Remote Only work promotes:

1. Hiring and working from all over the world *instead of* from a central location.
2. Flexible working hours *over* set working hours.
3. Writing down and recording knowledge *over* oral explanations.
4. Written down processes *over* on-the-job training.
5. Public sharing of information *over* need-to-know access.
6. Opening every document to change by anyone *over* top down control of documents.
7. Asynchronous communication *over* synchronous communication.
8. The results of work *over* the hours put in.
9. Formal communication channels *over* informal communication channels.

While there is sometimes value in the items on the right, we have come to value the items on the left more.

Zapier's Manifesto

Why Employees Favor Virtual Companies

Location Independence

When initiating conversations with potential hires, one of the first details that starts the dialogue relates to the organization being location-independent. Seeq finds that this flexibility attracts top talent worldwide.

Solving the Two-Body Problem

We find that the most critical problem concerning people when they change employment relates to what we call the two-body problem. Many at Seeq have significant others who also have jobs. For employees, the difficulty is coordinating the professional responsibilities of both their careers, which is very challenging. We have numerous examples of individuals looking for opportunities that are independent of location and support their partner's working requirements. A remote location also addresses the difficulties of being a partner to someone whose professional responsibilities require frequent relocation, for example, as with the military.

The first issue is collocating with their significant other's job. For example, we interviewed a chemical engineer who explained that her next promotion required her to relocate from California to Texas. Her husband would also need to move to the East Coast for his next promotion in a few years. This predicament caused her to preemptively consider geographically independent options so that she could support her spouse's career while continuing to develop hers. We satisfied that requirement entirely, and she wound up growing in technical areas that were outside her previous purview.

People also want to have the opportunity to move with their significant other. We hired a person from the Seattle area, and when his wife finished medical school, she wanted to complete her residency in Florida. They lived in that location for three years, and then, she wanted to start her practice in Oregon. Our virtual workplace allowed him to sustain his job with us during both relocations.

Other Location Drivers

While the two-body problem is the preeminent one for many people, several other advantages exist, benefiting a wide range of individuals.

Preferences

Some people want to live in a specific location. The traditional path means looking for a job in that area. Our solution is to join a business where one can live anywhere. In fact, after trying a new location, others can be explored later.

While our goal is to be completely location-independent, in some cases, we require employees to reside in a specific locale, creating geographic clusters. For example, we hired a several engineers who recently graduated from college. We told them that they could ultimately choose their location, but to start their career, we wanted them in the Houston area. We had mentoring resources there to onboard them successfully as well as excellent opportunities regarding customers. Research shows that new employees benefit from more formal mentoring. After the initial 18 to 24 months, they would have the freedom to choose a new location like their senior counterparts.

Hobbies and Side Jobs

Certain outdoor activities and hobbies necessitate unique locations. We have employees interested in kiteboarding, windsurfing, skydiving, rock climbing, and skiing. One engineer at Seeq participates and competes in equestrian events and breeds horses. To do that, she needs a horse ranch, and hers is in New Hampshire. Her husband continues to commute into the Boston area like she used to do. This arrangement allows her to feed the horses during the day and cuts down on her commute.

Family

Others want to move near family, whether it is to help aging parents or reconnect. Many cultures have multiple generations living near each other or together to support one another. A recent graduate and employee decided to live with her mother for a year to help with carpooling for her younger brother. Another employee's parents found out about the flexibility of their son's job. They invited him to spend a month or two each summer with them in India. He enjoyed his time with them, but he also helped Seeq. We have customers in that area as well as additional prospects that he could visit. He keeps up with his responsibilities and mentors new employees.

A word of caution to employees of virtual companies – do not tell your mother about your location independence unless you seriously want to consider it. She may exert a lot of pressure to move nearby!

"I'm thankful that my chosen profession allows me to experience the digital nomad lifestyle, that the executive team at Seeq was supportive, and, most of all, that my team was supportive and excited for me every step of the way."

— Dustin Johnson

Bi-Location

We have a subset of people in the United States who like to winter in the south and spend summers in the north. Seeq's CEO spends his summers in Washington state and his winters in Arizona. For him, the summers in Washington are perfect as opposed to the extreme temperatures of Arizona. Arizona winters are pleasantly moderate and provides respite from the dark, rainy, and sometimes icy winter conditions in Washington (clearly his family is not into winter sports). Another group enjoys changing locations based on seasonal activities like skiing and mountain biking. One employee and her husband are skydiving teachers in California for part of the year. During ski season, her husband's job as a snowboard instructor is in Colorado. This requires bi-location for their situation to work.

Nomads and Frequent Travelers

At this point in their lives, the always-traveling nomads do not need a house or to build a nest. They want to experience various locations through a virtual business. One employee, Dustin Johnson, joined Remote Year. This not-for-profit company takes a group of people who are remote employees and moves them to a different country each month for one year. In Dustin's case, he lived in four countries in South America, four in Europe, and four in Asia. By the end, he traveled to a total of 26 countries spanning 11 time zones. Read about his travels on our blog. Our technology makes it such that we rarely notice someone's physical location. Many people had no idea that Dustin was traveling around the world because, with our virtual office environment Qube, he was in his office down the hall.

Another nomad involves a single mom traveling with her son around the U.S. She configured a van and built a traveling house on wheels

Dustin Johnson traveling with Remote Year

that allows her the freedom to work, travel, and enjoy time with her son. She can work from anywhere that has the bandwidth to connect into the office.

A recently married couple spent nine months traveling and exploring the Western United States – an extended honeymoon. Other employees go off for two to three months to try out different locations. Three individuals own RVs, going from region to region. They connect their office technology and have an opportunity to experience moving around on their schedule.

Schooling Challenges

Some employees want to continue working on degrees that are not entirely virtual and require onsite participation. Having an officeless workplace enables them to complete their academic responsibilities while continuing their work without a formal disconnect. One of our VPs went to Berkeley for his MBA and then moved back to Washington state after completing the academic requirements.

Cost of Living and Schools for Children

Many people desire to move from high cost-of-living locations to cheaper places. Another requirement may be to simultaneously live in an affordable area that also has excellent schooling options for their children. Solving both these problems can be challenging but also having to look for new jobs can make it very difficult. A virtual company eliminates these problems. We have one couple who lives in a rural area with an excellent school system. Because of their skills, they would not have been as gainfully employed in that location.

Elise L Working on the Road

Government Sponsored Relocation Bonuses

Several locations now offer bonuses directly to employees of virtual businesses (e.g., Vermont's Remote Worker Grant Program). These locales are convinced that they offer a superior quality of life and believe that they could entice talent to their communities with relocation bonuses. These programs are growing, becoming more significant, and can include also educational assistance. Here is an example article listing such programs: link. See Appendix C to this paper for a compilation of such programs, but note that others are being added all of the time.

New Significant Other

It is relatively common for young adults to have long-distance relationships, which they are trying to nourish. Virtual offices provide employees with the opportunity to explore those relationships without worrying about compromising their careers. A couple of people took advantage of the ability to move to be with their new significant other. Others use the opportunity to travel back and forth, which minimizes the impact of long-distance relationships.

One employee has a long-term girlfriend whom he met as an exchange student in Italy. She comes to the U.S. to visit him, and he goes there. He is contemplating the possibility of establishing his office in Italy for an extended period. This option is a reality only because of the flexibility of remote working.

Accruing Benefits

Generally new employees join virtual companies because of location independence. Other benefits exist in addition to geographical independence and these become more important to the employee as her/his tenure grows.

Eliminate Commutes

Until one stops commuting, it is hard to fully appreciate how much time and energy we spend on that task. Currently, commuting is pretty common in many cities, and the amount of time required and the difficulty are both increasing. Being in a business where there is no commute or rush hour means employees can spend that time for the benefit of themselves, family, and the organization. We have several people who had a 90-minute commute each way. They did not have to move, but they no longer had a commute because they could remote into the office. Not only did their energy levels increase, but they also had additional time to invest with their family and in the company. It worked out for everyone.

Daily Family Coordination

Working at home means that one can solve daily family coordination issues. It allows people to share family responsibilities with their significant other. Being on the spot means solving problems and helping with carpooling. Some employees take a break when their children come home from school and engage with them, help with homework, or coach activities. In some cases, they return to the virtual office.

Seeq realizes that things pop up. For those working at home in a virtual environment with flexible work hours, they have the opportunity to solve those problems and reduce the stress in the family. It is complicated arranging and waiting for a plumber when working in an office with a long commute. What about picking up a sick child from school or taking a puppy to the vet? Our officeless system makes handling these tasks easier and with less pressure.

Family Emergencies

Sometimes, employees must deal with emergencies of a loved one, family, or friend in a different location. Being able to pack up your computer, technology, and tools and position yourself near them for a day, week, or month reduces the anxiety. It creates flexibility in your personal life that benefits you, your family, and others. Seeq had an employee who took advantage of that, and it significantly contributed to her quality of life.

> "When I was in Washington, D.C. working at NASA headquarters, I remember many people coming into the office grumpy in the mornings. It turns out they had a horrendous commute. Fortunately, I didn't have to do that, but it was amazing to see how much energy they expended on that task."
>
> — Steve Sliwa

Why Companies and Investors Benefit

If such significant benefits exist for employees, can companies harvest these to create value for the business? Absolutely.

Benefits for Companies

Team Quality

Team quality is the most significant advantage for companies that utilize an officeless environment. The quality is far superior because new hires do not have to be local or move to your location. Organizations have access to the best talent, regardless of locale.

Seeq finds that people value geographic independence and the other perks we offer, so we frequently can hire them for less base pay. One way to do this is by hiring from lower cost-of-living regions. Instead of recruiting from Silicon Valley, we are able to look in more rural areas. The employee does not have to move to an expensive city to land a high-quality job, and we employ top talent.

> "I firmly believe that having a virtual office environment minimizes some of the ad-hoc politics and maximizes performance accountability. You are either able to contribute or not. That's very apparent when you're in a virtual scenario."
>
> — Steve Sliwa

If the person is outstanding, why can't they remain where they are and connect into the office? Employees are perfectly happy to have good pay, but it does not have to be at the same level required for someone in Silicon Valley. Start by attracting the highest quality individuals who do not live in an expensive area. Because we bring the benefits of no commute, daily family coordination, and solving the two-body problem, people are more willing to accept a lower salary and one that is certainly lower than the astronomical ones in Silicon Valley and other city areas of high competition.

As a startup, Seeq generally does not provide the highest pay. We typically include stock options and the other benefits of a virtual company, so people are excited to join us. In most cases, they come aboard with a lower salary than they currently make. They are willing to trade money for our perks (as well as our stock options). Our observation is that because our turnover is so low, employees value it more and more, especially as they get used to it.

Another reason our team quality is excellent is that we have so many applicants for every position. Many people look for location-independent jobs and want to be in high-tech businesses with good growth opportunities. And, we sustain that quality with performance-based accountability.

The bottom line is that we have less turnover. So, we spend little time recruiting and more time growing capacity because we do not have to continuously replace people. Also, since individuals remain with the business longer, their experience level increases, resulting in higher-performing teams. That is a significant competitive advantage for virtual companies.

Rent Reduction is Not the Goal

Many people think that not having a physical building means that they can save on rent. At Seeq, we believe this is a fallacy and the wrong view. We invest about the same amount of money that would have gone for rent to ensure that we have the best-performing virtual team. We do not view it as a lower cost from the rent standpoint. We invest in things like annual all-company meetups, team-based breakout meetings, and employee offices, which ensures that everyone has a functional working setup. We also invest in supporting our technology and tools to make the virtual office environment work well.

Virtual companies can build a larger, higher-quality team faster, with less turnover and increased productivity, for the same budget.

With a fixed budget, one gets a better company because people are cheaper and of higher quality, are in place faster, and leave less often. If the goal is to stretch your dollars or seek the highest quality or productivity within a specific budget, we believe the virtual company provides that capability.

Working with Investors

We have encountered numerous people who are skeptical of virtual offices, and investors often fall into this category. We find that once they see our processes and the team we put together, they understand the advantages of our environment.

Chevron Technology Ventures

Seeq received an investment from Chevron Technology Ventures (CTV). They like to say that we were the first investment out of 72 to fail one of their mandatory criteria. The requirement is for their team to conduct a site visit, but the funny thing is that we do not have a site! Instead, we took the Seeq team to them. We set up their team so that they could participate inside our virtual office Qube, meet a multitude of Seeq team members, and experience our virtual office environment. After the fact, they said that the experience was beneficial because it exposed them to the modern ways of people working together.

Altira Group

For our Series B funding, Altira Group, a venture fund out of Denver, was apprehensive about us being a remote company. In fact, in the first draft of the term sheet, they included language related to choosing a site. They assumed that as we grew, eventually, we would have a physical location because that is the natural growth path for successful organizations.

During due diligence, however, they told us that the cohesiveness and alignment of our senior team were as good or better than all their previous investments. This helped alleviate their concern that remote teams are less effective. As a result of watching us grow and scale to triple our size and seeing the top talent we attract, they are firm believers in our strategy. Today, they are vocal proponents to others on how this has been a differentiator to Seeq and the high performance of our team.

How Seeq Makes It Work

Generally, Seeq believes that are two major areas of concentration to make this work. One is on the technology side where the best technologies, tools, techniques, and standard practices are adopted to make virtual offices work well. The other is the area of the culture, best practices for integrating new team members and developing a common set of team building protocols and an ethos for interactions. Hearkening to our background as a software company, we colloquially refer to these as our 'technology stack' and our 'culture stack'.

Best Technology Practices

A critical component of a thriving officeless environment is to solve the issue of interactivity between the people. These are the tools we use and rely on to tackle this problem. We break this into three areas. One is the software and technologies that maintain the entire virtual environment, another focuses on employee home offices, and the final supports the technology for the organization.

Qube – Seeq's Interactive Virtual Office Environment

Video conferencing is crucial to providing the face-to-face interactions necessary for remote work, and software exists supporting this currently. However, we felt that the capabilities were not enough for our needs. After experimenting with commercial packages, we developed our own virtual office application, Qube, which sits on top of Zoom, which is our current conferencing tool of choice. We built it such that it can sit on top of other programs just as easily because technology always changes, and we want the flexibility to move with it. Qube allows employees to have both scheduled and ad-hoc events, integrate with customers and other external meetings, and see the activities of others. It creates casual, impromptu interactions effortlessly, which is crucial to our culture.

Our goal for Qube was to simulate a physical office so that employees would feel like a cohesive team. We wanted a tool to promote the spontaneous activity that is essential for everyday casual interactions and social networking.

The above image is a view of one of our office floors. In 2019, we have three levels, and every employee has an office, represented by the small squares, i.e., cubes. We also have a variety of conference rooms, an auditorium, and social break spaces. When a person's avatar is in their office, it means they are available. If more than one person is in a room, then a meeting is in progress. If the room is empty, then that person is unavailable.

If you want to speak with someone, look in their office. Qube has a tool to locate their cube if necessary. If
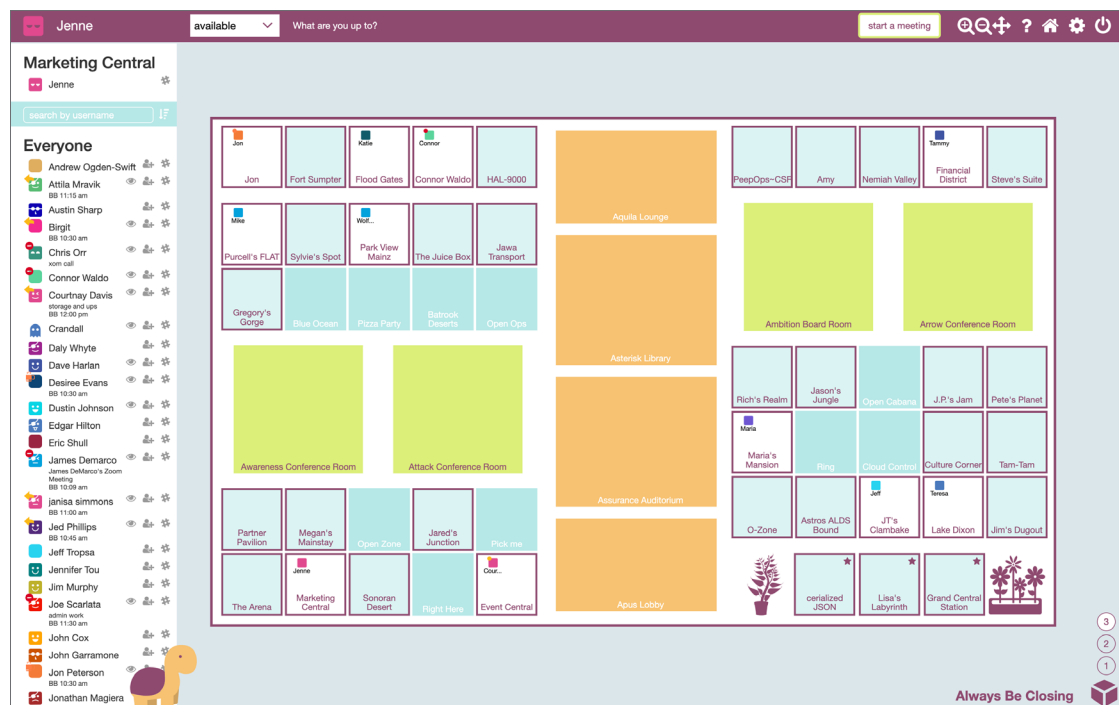
Qube: Seeq's virtual office software

they are in their office alone, then knock on their door by double-clicking with your mouse. The person in the office hears a knocking sound and sees: "Jane Doe wants to enter." If the person clicks the okay button, then a web conference video session automatically starts with Zoom. For conference rooms, knocking is unnecessary. Click the room, and once inside, it connects you with the web conference session for everyone in the room.

Qube can invite people to your office or conference room. Functionality also exists for auto-watching someone. If an individual is busy, set up a flag, and it will notify you when that person becomes available.

A prime benefit of this design is that it is a familiar paradigm because it looks like an office. It is like walking around to see people. For managers, they may start their day with only one or two scheduled meetings, but by the end of the day, they may have been in 10 or 12. These interactions may be a lengthy session for working through issues or jointly prepping materials. Alternatively, they can be casual one- or two-minute chats, which simulates managing by walking around. For example, someone might stop in and say, "How did the puppy do over the weekend?" or "How was your camping trip?" or "Did customer XYZ try out the new feature in our beta?" These are casual, quick communications for which most people do not formally schedule web calls.

Web conferencing tools like Webex, GoToMeeting, and Zoom are great for scheduling formal meetings, but they are less effective at informal check-ins. These tools alert users when someone is available, such as a green dot by their name, but our observation is that very few people use that to interact casually. Whereas with the Qube overlay, employees are familiar with the concept of walking down the hall and popping their head into someone's office. Our process encourages people to connect regularly. In fact, they become upset when Qube is down, even though it merely sits on top of the tools that provide the functionality. People can go straight to those apps, but our paradigm is the way they want to think about the coworkers around them.

We disagree with others who have written about virtual accountability and believe it is partially because they do not have a tool like Qube. They do not understand that people feel lonely as a remote worker because they do not think people are with them. By looking around, however, one sees that offices are full, meetings are in progress, and people are working hard, which emphasizes the fact that they are not alone. Even if someone is not actively engaged, they still receive the psychological benefits. Qube encourages the interactivity one finds in a physical office and creates a sense of belonging.

It is common for employees who are working long hours completing a task to feel like they are doing it alone. When that person sees the rest of their group working as hard as they are, however, it makes them feel part of the team and not the only one expending hours. It also works in the opposite situation. After completing a sprint, it makes employees more comfortable to see that others are taking a break as well and are not in their offices. It reinforces the cycle of work hard, recover, and prepare for the next sprint.

We also find that people observe meetings. For example, a team member may see two others in a meeting and have a pretty good idea of what they are discussing. That person decides to join the conversation, so they click on the room. Physical location is irrelevant. Even if that individual is in Europe, that employee can still enter the room. "Are you talking about a new feature for Qube? If so, do you mind if I join?" This impromptu environment allows everyone to see what is going on and perhaps participate, even if it was not scheduled.

We use this same setup to connect with customers, and they seem to enjoy it. We have a conference room, and they come into it. If they have a question, we can invite them to join. This process is beneficial for actively engaging with our customers.

Zoom

We use Zoom for web conferencing because it addresses our concerns – high-quality video conferencing, ability to share screens, and some of the etiquettes we use. One of the critical conventions for us is that we turn on video for all meetings with 10 or fewer people. Zoom supports 50 or more, but we tend to turn it off once we have more than 10. Sometimes, we go as high as 20, and screens easily accommodate 6x5 images, so 30 individuals. We opt for that when we have certain parties or when we want more interactivity. For larger meetings, presenters turn their audio and video on while others turn theirs off, making delivery easier. Occasionally, people connect from low bandwidth areas, so that helps them stay integrated. For committee meetings and standups, we turn the video on and interact with each other. We believe it is essential to see each other's faces, body language, and expressions.

Slack

We use Slack for posting comments and remarks. We set it up with separate channels for different topics. All employees are on Slack as well as some stakeholders and investors.

Slack is different from messaging because the channels have communications with individuals but also ones on specific topics, such as customer successes and news about the competition. People can leave a channel and come back to it because the information stays there permanently. When new employees come on board, they can join a channel and read about what went on previously. That is not possible with text messages. It is also better than email because no one has to forward the email thread. The conversation always lives in Slack, and one only has to invite others to the channel when necessary.

Confluence

Most leaders of remote-only environments find it critical to have written documentation, so they need an internal documentation tool. We use Atlassian's Confluence but also other tools like an internal wiki. We rely less on face-to-face conversations, although those take place regularly, but we try to make the process as easy as possible to work independently. To do that, we document most things, make those files open, and expect people to edit them. When someone works through something but does not understand it, they ask for help and then alter the information. We want everyone to improve our internal materials continuously.

Office365 and SharePoint

We use Microsoft's Office365 for email and SharePoint for storage of all our files and documents. One great thing about using SharePoint is that collaboration now works on Office365 files so that people can work on them concurrently. This makes it easier to track changes, coordinate feedback, and pull things together for upcoming meetings.

These four tools, in combination with Qube, make up our essential technology stack for communication and working together. They support the way we work – synchronously for about 20% of our work, and asynchronously for about 80%. Synchronously means working with each other simultaneously, such as video conferencing. Asynchronously means working independently, such as someone posting on a Slack channel and others reading it at their convenience.

Home Offices

The second technology we must address is the home office. Our setup depends on everyone having a suitable work environment. In our cover letter, we include verbiage that says employees can choose where to live, but their office must be set up in a way that works well.

Our employee handbook includes a list of requirements that describes the minimum bandwidth and other details, setting the required expectations upfront. We pay for internet service, cell phone, computer, and other tools necessary for a virtual office, up to a preset amount. In 2019, our allocation is $5K per employee. We informally allocate $1K per year for upgrades, service, and support. We stress the importance of having a functional home office.

Some people start out thinking that they are going to work from their dining room table, but our recommendation is that will not work in the long term. They need to create a comfortable environment.

Our documents, which live in Confluence or on our internal wiki, document some of the best technologies and practices, but we do not mandate a particular solution. We encourage everyone to post what they use and why they like it in addition to resources for where to buy it. Employees willingly keep this up-to-date because they want to continuously learn and have the best working environment.

We also include a budget of about $250 per month for shared office space, but outliers exist. A couple of employees had difficulty creating functional areas and asked for a more formal deal where they made arrangements with a local business. For the most part, people

work from their home offices or RV. Occasionally, team members spend time in a shared office space or use a conference room, especially if they are in a lonely or quiet place.

Supporting Technologies Stack

Every company, whether conventional or virtual, needs supporting technology. The following apps comprise Seeq's technology stack to run the business. We decided to commit to these tools for two years, and then we will stop and reevaluate the market.

Insperity | UHC | GuideLine

Seeq is currently a professional employer organization (PEO), which means that everyone at Seeq is co-employed with Insperity. While we run the day-to-day operations and management, Insperity takes care of the human resources aspects, such as payroll. It also makes us a part of a larger organization that provides better buying rates for health insurance and other benefits. UnitedHealthcare (UHC) provides our health benefits, and Guideline manages our 401(k) plans.

Intacct

Currently, we use finance as a service (FaaS) with Consero Global to conduct the day-to-day accounting and monthly closes. They provide all the necessary support and tools. We have a couple of inhouse people to coordinate these efforts, but we decided that our focus should be on customer and employee interactions.

Expensify

Instead of using spreadsheets and tracking receipts manually, we use Expensify to track expenses. Employees benefit from a simplified process and are paid faster.

Lattice

To give employees feedback and track their goals, we use Lattice. It is an excellent way to give praise and share updates with managers and the rest of the company.

Atlassian JIRA

For our software development tool, we use JIRA, which ties together with Confluence as well as some of our support applications. This product works exceptionally well for tracking bugs in agile projects.

Salesforce | HubSpot | Matomo

We use Salesforce as our customer relationship management tool. HubSpot is our inbound and outbound marketing coordinating system, which works with our website and other internal tools. Matomo, formerly Piwik, tracks how people use our software product, and that information guides both support and development of the product as well as sales.

Those are the primary tools we use, but we also rely on a few others for specific purposes. For training team members and customers, we use Absorb LMS. For PowerPoint management, our tool of choice is Shufflrr. Because our employees find equity tracking and options management important, we utilize Carta for equity management. We use Pingboard to maintain and track our organizational chart.

Best Cultural Practices

Developing a culture in remote companies can be challenging, and thus requires a concerted effort. Therefore, we implement the following practices to enhance our overall environment and implement our 'culture stack.'

Recruiting

We handle the majority of Seeq's recruitment process online with web conferences, partially to get people used to the way we work. Interviewees want location-independent jobs, but they do not know how it is going to work entirely and are nervous. By involving them in several interviews and meetings and talking with current employees, it makes them more comfortable. They get an idea of what it is going to be like, which makes the transition easier. Plus, we can evaluate them to see if they will work well in our virtual environment.

We conduct one-on-one and group interviews. On the software side, applicants take a coding or technology test where they have an opportunity to show their aptitude in software. In over 90% of the cases, we hire people with no in-person meeting. The entire process is online, which means that we can include more team members in the hiring decision. We have tools that record people's observations and share them because it creates effective communication.

It is fun to see employees when they finally meet face-to-face and shake hands. Because of our excellent virtual tools and processes, people have a hard time remembering if they have formally met or not. One way that makes it apparent is height. "I know this is the first time we've met because I had no idea that you were so tall!"

Onboarding

In most cases, onboarding occurs virtually, but in about 20% of the cases, we send someone on a site visit to the new employee's location and help set up their equipment. This mostly applies to software engineers. We get their computer up and running and ensure that they have all the necessary tools. But most importantly, we confirm that they can build the software and run the automated test suites. If there is a problem with an employee's computer, we send someone out for a couple of days to resolve the issue.

We have a comprehensive onboarding process where we expose team members to various parts of the company. We also walk them through their benefits and requirements and discuss the cultural aspects of the organization. Our extensive training manuals and documents are available to everyone. We have an onboard syllabus for each position. When people go through these documents, we stress that it is an employee's responsibility to learn the information but also to update and improve the material. As employees further their Seeq career, they sometimes find new knowledge. "I wish I would have known about this sooner!" They take that information and add it to the onboarding documents.

Writing down this knowledge, instead of verbally delivering it, is vital because people need information quickly, and we do not have much time for informal face-to-face communication. We document as many things as possible and ensure visibility into everything. Even our draft documents are visible. In conventional-location businesses, informal orientation helps with the passing of tribal knowledge. At Seeq, we recommend writing down and documenting everything.

Each job function also has a checklist based on time. For example, one checklist might be for the first week and another for the second. Each list has hints on how to complete the items. The time phasing helps people assess if they are "on schedule." One thing on many of the checklists is to meet some of the senior executives to ensure that everyone feels comfortable knocking on management's door and visiting and vice versa.

For most jobs, we assign a formal mentor to help the person transition to Seeq by making sure they attend the correct meetings and interact with people. Sometimes, we conduct boot camps for groups of six or more new hires over two or three days. They receive extensive training on various aspects of their jobs to bring them up to speed faster.

Value-Centered

Seeq has a value statement, which is shown in its entirety in Appendix D. Our values are:

- Act with Integrity
- Make a Difference for Our Customers
- Value Every Team Member
- Promote Agility and Creativity
- Support Our Community
- Exercise Financial Responsibility
- Continuous Improvement

The overall team works on this statement to keep it up-to-date and ensure that our work relates to our values. As we implement our software tools, we explicitly point out where we support these.

Positive Reinforcement

In remote environments, management must provide ample opportunity for praise so that people stay connected. We have a dedicated Slack channel named Kudos. Usually, one or two messages are posted daily where people call out a colleague for something great they did. This behavior is vital to Seeq's culture and values. We also have a quarterly award called the Mounted Thing Award, which is one more way to ensure people feel connected.

Transparency

We are steadfast in our resolve to have transparency in everything we do. Our financials are visible, and we review the charts shared in the Board Meetings with the company in the following week. We post and explain all critical decisions. Seeq works hard to maintain this openness because remote workers complain the most about not being privy to decisions, knowledge, or information. We use hyper-transparency to ensure that is not the case.

We invite employees to attend Board Meetings on a rotating basis. Those in attendance usually report back that they enjoyed being there, meeting the board members, and hearing the discussion. They confirm that there are no significant differences from what the senior team reports.

Virtual Events and Meetings

Seeq's organizational goals are to maintain a high-performing team. To do that, we ensure that morale is high by hosting corporate-wide meetings, events, and parties like location-dependent companies do. We take advantage of our technology to conduct these get-togethers, and our etiquette and protocols ensure that we optimize and make efficient use of the time.

Show and Tell

Weekdays from 8:00 to a hard stop at 8:15 am Pacific Time, a Seeq employee presents a show and tell. Attendance at the daily event is about 75% of the company. The presenters select
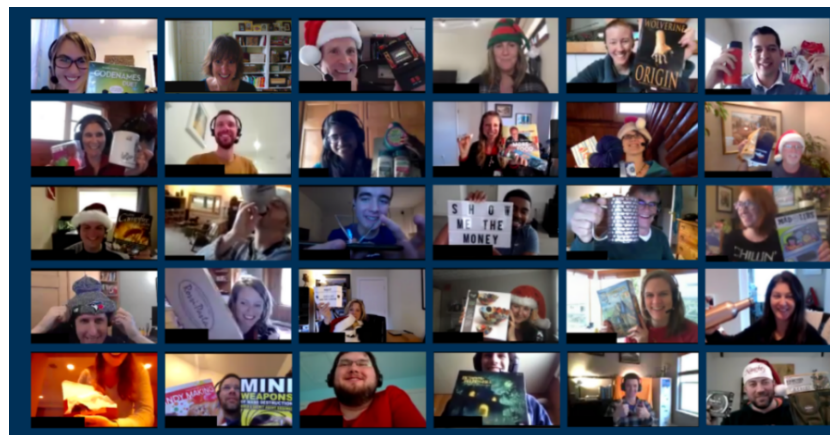
Seeq-ret Santa Gift Exchange 2018

their topic, which can be anything they want like something about themselves or their family, a new recipe, recent vacation, project or hobby, or their country of origin. With an average of 260 working days per year, we cover many subjects.

Typically, a speaker presents and then posts more information and reference materials on a dedicated Slack channel. After the presentation, people often follow up and learn more. This process provides an opportunity to exchange information, creates more knowledge, and connects people from around the company and the world.

Book Club

The development team started an Article Club to discuss technical articles. By selecting one document each week, they noticed that a wider rotation of people participated because it only required 10 minutes of preparation and no continuity from the previous week. Unfortunately, the group found that it was often difficult to generate a productive conversation, and over time, finding new and relevant articles became challenging and time-consuming. They noticed the discussion was more engaging when the articles focused on some aspect of culture.
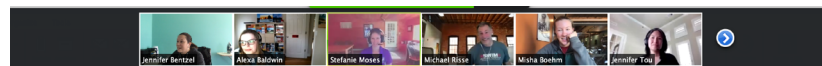

Show and Tell

We changed the format to a Book Club for the entire organization where the group focuses on a single book and discusses one chapter every other week for 45 minutes. Upfront preparation is important but not extensive. We find that choosing a few salient points and building questions around them produce a forum for healthy dialogue. When we first started, having everyone answer the questions built cohesiveness within the group. Applying the chapter to something specific at Seeq, such as our stage as a startup or being a remote company, fuels the conversation even further.

The Book Club becomes a place to build and shape our corporate culture. It strengthens the organization by connecting people across departments who usually do not interact. It develops our team because many of the discussions revolve around topics like motivation, leadership styles, and diversity. We can then apply those to our everyday interactions at Seeq. Often, the points brought up at Book Club resurface at a retrospective or meetup.

Diversity and Multidisciplinary Guilds

We encourage diversity at Seeq and actively support it within our guilds and corporate culture. For example, at one of the annual meetups, we had a special speaker. After she presented to the entire organization, she led a breakout session, which was sponsored by the Women of Seeq (a new Affinity Group within Seeq). In this case, they talked about building a career in a male-dominated industry like technology.

We also have guilds that concentrate on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and one that focuses solely on the culture at Seeq. These groups ensure that we have the tools, processes, and events in place to support culture and inclusivity initiatives across the organization.

Women of Seeq

Themed Parties

Halloween is a fun holiday for us. We usually have a theme, such as pirates, and people dress up for it and attend the virtual party. We also have mystery plays where individuals role-play during the get-together, and people have to guess who the guilty party is.

At Christmas, we have a gift exchange program where individuals receive a gift from an unknown team member. People buy gifts that are appropriate for their assigned person, and we open them together using Zoom.

Other parties include baby and wedding showers and celebrations for significant departures, such as a group of interns, or other corporate successes.

Halloween Murder Mystery Costume Party

Technical Meetings

Of course, we also conduct the standard meetings that most tech companies have:

Stand-Up

Some teams have a quick daily meeting to catch up, which lasts either 15 or 30 minutes.

Tag-Up

The entire company comes together weekly for 30 minutes to hear about current happenings. The week after a Board Meeting, management reviews the charts and summarizes the discussions from that session

Sprint Demo

During these corporate-wide monthly meetings, the development team shares its results from the previous month. In addition, the analytics and engineering team and the sales and marketing teams have the equivalent of a sprint demo where they report on recent progress and provide insights on what is happening.

Judicious In-Person Meetings

To make the virtual environment successful, we must have judicious in-person meetings. For example, all employees gather in one central location for our annual meetup. Also, the leadership team meets face-to-face a couple of days before the monthly board meetings. Once a quarter, these sessions are in-person, while the others are virtual.

Individual departments and groups sometimes have collocated meetings during the year. We take advantage of customer interactions by sending two or three employees for direct communication. At times, we send people out to train others. Trade shows require up to two dozen team members, and when we are there, we create activities to work together, meeting and bonding with each other.

AE Bootcamp Meetup

Flexible Hours and No Tracking of PTO (Personal Time Off)

Seeq encourages employees to be professional and complete their jobs. We hold them accountable for accomplishing their tasks instead of tracking the time that they are in or out of the office. If they need to adjust their schedule for a day or even every week, we ask them to coordinate with their supervisor. The manager needs ample time to backfill tasks when necessary.

A flexible schedule is critical to making it easy for people to come and go as they need. As a result, Seeq does not have working hours that correspond to 9 to 5 in one time zone. Pacific Time (PT) is our core time, and we encourage people to overlap with that as much as possible. However, we do not set a minimum amount.

Our Malaysian team has difficulty with this, so we conduct a biweekly meeting with them. The timing is such that it is early for them and late for those on PT. That team operates mostly asynchronously, but all other departments have several hours that overlap with PT.

In general, we provide a guideline of four to five weeks off per year, depending on seniority. We are not upset if employees take more or less time as long as they meet their objectives. Since members of virtual teams tend not to use their personal time, we encourage them to take quick breaks here and there. We also include a bonus program where we pay a small amount to those who take five consecutive days off in a given year. This encourages people to have a formal vacation at least once a year.

Advice for Virtual Companies

When starting a virtual business, we find that it is essential to make some upfront investments to kick off the organization in the correct way. At Seeq, we broke this down into three areas – technology, culture, and best practices for in-person meetings.

Technology Solutions

For the technology to come together, companies must create an environment that is conducive to visually connecting employees. First, remote-only organizations must have video conferencing with excellent video. Then, they must find a way to encourage synchronous, ad-hoc meetings. Our in-house tool Qube, which we might ultimately commercialize, sits on top of Zoom, but other commercial packages exist.

Once that comes together, organizations need to invest in a tool for asynchronous communication, such as Slack. Team members need a way to create lists, write things down, and document various items. For Seeq, it is essential to have an area for adding kudos where people consistently congratulate each other, reinforcing an important aspect of our culture. We feel the mechanisms for creating seamless interactions are critical.

Investing in home offices for employees is also vital to the success of a virtual office. Organizations need to budget for this as well as creating a process, a toolset, comparisons, and recommendations for setting up those offices. We encourage people to take extra time to create a good setup in the beginning. Typically when people first start working remotely, many have provisional home offices. We encourage our employees to create an office that is comfortable and in an environment where they can be high-performing.

Invest in Culture

We suggest investing time in creating a culture stack and clearly defining corporate values upfront. Seeq values interactions between employees, complimenting team members, and having hyper-transparency. Dedicate time to establish recruiting and onboarding processes that will ultimately create a powerful team. Also, plan virtual events and meetings to encourage interactions with the entire organization.

Best Practices for In-Person Meetings

Virtual companies cannot succeed by being completely virtual without any direct interactions. Employees must meet each other occasionally. Use the budget that would have been for the physical location for an annual full-team meeting and group breakouts as necessary. Develop a strategy for creating judicious face-to-face meetups.

When we first formed Seeq, we thought we needed to get together once every month or two. Then, we shifted to once a quarter, once every six months, and ultimately settled on once a year for an all-team meeting.

Initially, we used these meetings to conduct detailed work using whiteboards. As our tools progressed, however, we found that we were used to our virtual process of working with our sharing and collaboration tools. When we were on the road, we did not always have these tools and found that we were less productive. We relied on the environment of our technology stack for getting things done.

Since our workflow had changed, we decided to focus on team-oriented activities when we gathered as a group. We concentrate on

building the team and finding ways to create team interactivity, bonding, connectivity, and knowledge. We work on things that require consensus like setting up a new process, organizing ideas, or agreeing on priorities. We have exercises where we talk about those topics and other events where we get to know each other. When growing a business and going from a flat hierarchy to one with more structure, groups, teams, and guilds, it is critical to find the best way to do that. So, we have those conversations as a group. We could probably do that virtually almost as well, but performing those exercises together helps with the bonding process.

Teams also conduct breakout sessions when necessary. For example, the software engineering team met offsite in Nashville for three and a half days. They called it Seeq Geeq Weeq. They participated in team-building activities, but they spent the majority of their time brainstorming and planning. After many discussions, the team reorganized themselves in terms of the way they focused on their objectives going forward.

Team photo from Seeq Geeq Weeq

At Seeq, we firmly believe that virtual companies have a tremendous advantage over traditional ones. However, organizations must invest in the technology solution, the culture, and creating best practices for judicious in-person meetings from the beginning to provide the proper foundation for success.

Summary

The combination of exceptional employees with low turnover rates and a highly productive, and arguably more advantageous environment, means that virtual companies have a competitive advantage. At Seeq, we plan to continue investing in the necessary resources, both technical and cultural, to make our organization thrive today and be category leaders in the future.

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About Seeq

Founded in 2013, Seeq publishes software applications for manufacturing organizations to rapidly find and share data insights. Oil & gas, pharmaceutical, specialty chemical, utility, renewable energy and numerous other vertical industries rely on Seeq to improve production outcomes, including yield, margins, quality, and safety. Headquartered in Seattle, Seeq is a privately held virtual company with employees and partners in the United States, Asia, Canada, Europe, and South America.

Appendix A – Perceived Disadvantages of a Virtual Company

The topic of officeless workplaces is frequently discussed and written about by the press and in blogs. From these articles and conversations, we created a list of the most commonly mentioned downsides and concerns. Then, we map Seeq's experiences to those perceived disadvantages.

1. Hiring Slackers

Many people view remote workers as slackers, and those attracted to these jobs are unmotivated employees who are more concerned about their quality of life than their career. Critics believe remote workers escape reality by avoiding the conventional workplace.

For every job posting at Seeq, we have hundreds of applicants within a week or two. Therefore, we can be very selective, and we have had outstanding results. We have not experienced slackers. Instead, we find talented people who do not want to relocate to Silicon Valley or some other large city. They want to remain in their current environment, doing an excellent job. Since we choose from people all around the world, we have access to the best talent. Applicants must demonstrate something spectacular to join our team. We jokingly say that it is easier to get into Harvard than being hired by Seeq.

2. Lack of Casual Interactions and Team Bonding

People, in general, feel that casual, day-to-day interactions are essential ways of communicating. The belief is that leaders should pop into people's offices to motivate and align team members. They see a lack of management by walking around and team bonding in virtual environments.

We agree that it is challenging to build a social network for high-performing organizations. To solve this problem, we devoted considerable effort to building Qube, our interactive virtual office environment. The graphical office metaphor makes employees feel comfortable popping into someone's office, i.e., their cube. Our solution solves both problems of interacting and bonding.

In fact, Millennials and later generations are more used to technology, and they enjoy the rapid interactions. Qube fits nicely with their desired workflows.

3. Harder to Communicate and Collaborate

Many find that in-person meetings are best, and remote teams need more clarification to be successful. Also, people believe that it is difficult to share, brainstorm, and collaborate on ideas virtually, preferring conference rooms and whiteboards for these activities.

Seeq's virtual technology stack – Qube, Zoom, Slack, Confluence, and Office365 and SharePoint – promotes synchronous and asynchronous communications for collaborating and sharing. Some people do well in spontaneous, extemporaneous meetings in front of the whiteboard, but often, individuals need more time to think about things. With both parallel and non-parallel tools integrated within our tool stack, we do not experience the disadvantages that people describe.

4. Unhealthy Work-Life Balance

The belief is that when people work remotely, they do not take a break from their job and most likely stay connected 24x7. Some employees with physical offices experience this as well, but the thought is that it is more prevalent for off-site employees.

Seeq counters that with our culture stack by promoting family time, giving bonuses for vacations, and sharing family news proactively. We highly value the idea of taking breaks and solving the work-life balance issue. If an employee does not do that, then that person is not in sync with other team members. We provide a culture response to avoid this problem.

5. Less Accountability

Some think that remote employees can hide easily and avoid evaluation. We find the opposite. Each person is assessed and measured by their contributions, not by the facetime they put in at the office. In our experience, it is more difficult to provide excuses virtually. Underperformers are typically the ones interacting with people and creating bonds. They have good explanations for why their work is not complete, whereas virtual employees have deliverables, and one either achieves those goals or not. It is hard to say that the dog ate your homework. Virtual environments are based on results and deliverables and less on the delivery.

6. Loneliness

The impression is that officeless workers feel disconnected and experience loneliness as a result. They believe decisions are made without them, and to solve that, the only choice is to join a conventional employer.

When hiring, we look for people who will use our technology and culture stack best practices to integrate with other employees professionally, socially, and casually. Our inclusive solution – social and in-person meetings, virtual walkabout environment, ensuring mentoring and connections – has been very successful at avoiding the loneliness factor. Part of that could be that we select employees capable of working through this.

Appendix B – Tangible Benefits of a Virtual Company

Virtual companies have numerous tangible, measurable, and financial performance benefits that lead to a competitive advantage over traditional, location-based organizations.

1. Attract Higher Quality People

Traditional companies must hire locally or find people willing to move. Officeless businesses do not have this constraint because they can employ top-quality individuals from anywhere in the world. This creates a competitive advantage for virtual companies.

2. No Commute

Eliminating the drive to and from work translates into more hours available for home and work. Employees frequently expend significant time and energy commuting, which takes time away from their ability to contribute to the business. This perk is a tangible benefit for employees and virtual organizations.

3. Higher Morale

Employee morale is higher when they have a better work-life balance. They feel more engaged in their family life because their work does not take away from their personal time. This leads to higher morale and increased productivity. On the other hand, location-dependent employees typically miss family activities due to their commute. The family ends up waiting on them, lowering morale. Higher morale is a tangible benefit for employees and the company.

4. Low Turnover Rates

Virtual companies have much lower turnover rates. For example, Seeq's yearly rate for employees leaving is in the low single digits. Other companies in our space encounter 20-30% per year. These businesses experience high turnover because they must compete with the local competition that is continuously trying to recruit their employees away. Leaders realize that their staff is always at risk of going to another company.

If the corporation announces bad news, their top talent may bolt because it is easy for them to find a safer job. In addition, employees may look for higher-paying jobs or ones with a shorter commute. This environment is conducive to frequent turnover, and retaining employees requires significant effort. In our minds, remote-only businesses have a tremendous measurable and financial advantage.

5. Reduced Employee Costs

People value solving the two-body problem with a spouse or partner, a better work-life balance, and location-independence. Those employees, who take the time to think about it, are willing to compromise on salary because they have a complete benefits package, including a workplace of their choice, salary, bonuses, and stock options. They also take into account their increased quality of life.

Geographically based companies cannot offer these benefits, so they are forced to recruit people who must relocate or steal employees from the competition. Moreover, they must compete on salary alone. At Seeq, we tell potential hires that they will probably have to take a pay cut to join us in return for the other benefits that we bring to the table. We find this a significant financial advantage over traditional businesses.

6. Add People Quickly

When we post jobs, we receive hundreds of applications very quickly. We believe we can staff a team faster and with higher quality at a lower salary expense than traditional location-based businesses. This provides virtual companies with a competitive advantage and tangible financial benefits.

7. Greater Engagement of Distributed Sales Force

Almost every company has a distributed sales force. For traditional businesses, surveys show that managing or adding to these remote sales teams is hard, and they have variable performance, lower morale, and high turnover.

Since an officeless company is already virtual, they better engage these remote employees. Optimization of working with distributed employees is the basis for virtual organizations. Therefore, as the business scales, they can easily add people in the field. We find this a competitive advantage as well as a financial benefit.

8. Better Management of Outsourced Teams

Most companies outsource in some way, whether it is for development, IT, or simply conducting business in another location. The argument is that since virtual organizations do this for all their core work, they can manage their ancillary work better. Outsourced workers challenge traditional operation's models, and businesses typically have a tough time integrating them into the decision processes and extracting the full value out of those resources. This is another competitive advantage for virtual companies.

9. Easier Scaling

Doubling the number of virtual people does not have to change the way a company operates or the interactions of employees. As location-based companies become larger, however, the physical space must increase, and suddenly, the people in the two corners of the building may never see each other or interact. As the scaling continues to multiple floors and across several buildings, it is almost impossible to create interactivity, especially with no tools to promote and encourage that behavior.

By design, virtual businesses easily handle people distributed physically, whether their location is a few feet or hundreds of miles apart or on a different continent. When it is time to scale, the process does not break the culture, traditions, or ways of working together as it does in a physical-based location. This is a significant competitive advantage.

10. Performance-Based

Virtual companies are more performance-oriented since watercooler politics and backdoor negotiations are easier to expose. For officeless organizations, what an employee delivers is judged by people who remotely look at the work. The evaluation is on what is delivered, not how it is delivered. This results in higher-quality work and is a key tangible benefit for virtual companies.

11. Less Lost Time Due to Illnesses

One of the prime locations people are exposed to germs and viruses is at the workplace. Employee's mean well by working even when sick, but it may actually introduce more health issues to colleagues by continuing to work when infectious. Virtual offices don't suffer from being incubators of health issues during flu and cold seasons. As a result, it is expected the virtual office environments suffer from less lost time due to illnesses.

It circles back to the original premise. For a fixed budget, remote-only organizations receive higher-quality people – faster, for less salary, and with lower turnover. The result is higher-performing teams, leading to numerous performance benefits and an undeniable competitive advantage.

Appendix C – Example Relocation Bonus Programs for Which Remote Workers May Qualify

This is a compilation of locations offering bonuses for which remote workers in virtual office may qualify:

Relocation Bonus Program for which Remote Workers May Qualify	
Location	**Benefits**
Vermont Remote Worker Grant Program	Each participant received up to $5,000 ($3,700, on average) to cover moving costs, broadband expenses, coworking space fees and hardware or software expenses.
Alaska Permanent Fund	Annual dividend paid $1600 per person in 2018.
Tulsa Remote Program	The Tulsa Remote program pays people $10,000 to move to the Oklahoma city. In addition to the stipend, the initiative also features incentives like a membership to a coworking space, upwards of three months discounted rent in a furnished apartment and a schedule of community events and programs.
Chattanooga, TN	Through a program called Geek Move, the Chattanooga Tennessee metro area incentivized computer developers to move south with $1,250 for relocation costs and a $10,000 forgivable mortgage.
Hamilton, OH	Hamilton is offering young professionals a cash incentive of up to $10,000 to relocate there. The money is paid out in increments of $300 a month via a fund called the Talent Attraction Program Scholarship. Among other qualifications, applicants must have graduated within the past seven years from a STEAM program (one focused on science, technology, engineering, the arts or mathematics).
Saskatchewan, Canada	The Canadian province of Saskatchewan gives students a tax credit of up to $20,000 Canadian dollars (about $15,000 U.S. dollars) on their income tax through the Graduate Retention Program (GRP).
Lincoln, Kansas	Lincoln is giving out free property lots that range in size from 12,000 to 35,000 square feet. The caveat is that potential home builders must complete construction within a set period of time and adhere to certain guidelines.
Chile	Entrepreneurs looking to work in South America might be interested in Start-Up Chile (SUP). Launched in 2010 by the Chilean government, it's one of the world's top accelerators. Techies who participate in the Santiago-based Seed program, for example, can receive upwards of $80,000 equity-free, in addition to work visas, training and office space. SUP also runs The S Factory, a pre-acceleration initiative geared towards female entrepreneurs that provides up to $25,000 equity-free.
Marne's Free Lot Program Marne, Iowa	Marne's Free Lot Program, similar to the initiative in Lincoln, Kan., provides free lots measuring 80 feet by 120 feet to transplants willing to build their own houses. The minimum size house to be built is 1,200 square feet.
Harmony, MN	Harmony, Minn. is offering potential inhabitants a residential home construction rebate. Both spec (custom) and model homes qualify, with zero restrictions on residency, age or income.
Albinen, Switzerland	In 2017, residents voted yes to a proposal to pay $25,000 to each adult and $10,000 per child to live in their picturesque village. Those interested must be younger than 45 years old and commit to living in Albinen for 10 years. They also need to buy or construct a house valued at 200,000 Swiss francs (about $202,500) or more. If you're not from Switzerland, you must secure a C permit, which is given to settled foreign nationals.
Buying into Baltimore Vacants to Value Baltimore, MD	The Buying into Baltimore program gives potential homeowners a $5,000 credit toward their future abode. To qualify for the money, you need to attend a special tour hosted by Live Baltimore. Another option is the Vacants to Value booster program, which provides $10,000 toward a down payment and closing costs to purchase previously vacant properties.
Candela, Italy	Offers transplants by offering them between 800 and 2,000 euros ($910 to $2,775 in U.S. dollars) to relocate. Those interested need to officially become Candela residents, rent a house and earn a salary of at least 7,500 euros.
Maine	The 2008 Opportunity Maine Tax Credit, which helps pay off the student loans of Maine residents, has expanded to out-of-state workers. After you move to Maine, the amount of money you put toward paying your student loans each year is subtracted from your state income taxes. So if you pay $1,800 in student loans, but you owe the state $2,000 in taxes, then you just pay Maine $200 at tax time.
New Haven, CT	The Re:New Haven initiative offers up to $80,000 in incentives for new homeowners, including $10,000 interest-free to use as a down payment on a new home, or to cover your closing costs on a house. It's also offering up to $30,000 toward home renovations and energy-saving upgrades, and $40,000 for college tuition.

Appendix D – Seeq's Values

At Seeq, we are guided by the following values, which describe our company as we want it to be. By living these values as we plan our work, make decisions, interact with others and take action on behalf of the company, we believe we can positively impact our colleagues, suppliers, customers, shareholders and the broader community.

Act with Integrity

At Seeq, our reputation is of the utmost importance to us. We strive for strong and lasting relationships both inside and outside the organization. These can only be maintained when we abide by applicable laws and regulations, take responsibility for our actions and demonstrate the highest standards of ethical conduct in everything we do.

Make a Difference for Our Customers

Our customers trust us with providing insights to critical missions. This fact inspires us to take on the toughest challenges, drive for results and work side by side with our customers on products and services that meet or exceed their expectations. When faced with conflicting alternatives we prefer the ones that maximize customer satisfaction. We are passionate about what we do and proud of what we can accomplish as a team to ensure our customers' success.

Value Every Team Member

It takes a highly talented, diversified team to do what we do at Seeq. We understand that every member of our organization is here because they have a perspective, a skill and a set of experiences that can add value to our business. As such, we strive for an environment based on inclusion, teamwork, mutual respect and positive interactions.

Promote Agility and Creativity

Building our reputation as a pioneer and industry leader requires that we continuously strive for innovative, cutting-edge solutions. As we grow and formalize our processes, we must oppose "bureaucracy for bureaucracy's sake," eliminate barriers to cooperation or resource sharing across the organization, and critically evaluate anything that limits our agility or creativity.

Support Our Community

Our employees live and work across the country and around the world. Everywhere we are, we strive to leave local businesses, community residents, and the land around us better as a result of our presence. We also recognize our responsibility to our employees and their families. Seeq encourages its teammates to seek a balance between work and life outside the office.

Exercise Financial Responsibility

We are in partnership with our stakeholders to seek a fair return on our products and services and to exercise fiscal responsibility with our resources. In so doing, we will add to Seeq's financial strength and ability to compete in our chosen markets.

Continuous Improvement

Our future success depends on our willingness to learn from past experiences and relentlessly pursue opportunities for improvement. We will continue to thrive by embracing and capitalizing on change, which is an essential part of transforming Seeq for the future.

Appendix E – Seeq's All-Team Meeting

One goal for our all-team meetings is for employees to interact and get to know each other. Therefore, we plan a variety of activities to provide opportunities for team members to meet people they do not already know. Each annual meeting is different, but the following are some events we have included in the past.

We create events around breakfast, lunch, and dinner. For example, one day we may assign team members to groups and designate the person who will choose the lunch restaurant. Those people go to the selected place and have time to get to know one another.

We conduct several prioritization exercises, discuss values, and see where the conversations go. We have specific social events where we meet at a museum or food court, providing yet another opportunity for team members to interact. In some cases, buses transport people back and forth. We also schedule activities like rock climbing. Each of these situations creates a chance to meet new people within the organization.

Employees at Seeq particularly enjoy working with not-for-profit businesses. We take time out of our meetings to volunteer. One year, we spent half a day helping a food bank change locations. We packed the boxes, loaded the truck, and unloaded the supplies at the new site. The team was proud of the work we did, and it was a fantastic opportunity for team members to bond.

Another time, we built bicycles for underprivileged children. We constructed the bikes, and the Boys & Girls Club, the sponsor of the event, brought the kids in to see them. It was great working together as well as seeing the smiles on their faces when they arrived.

We also dedicate time to training events by bringing in outside trainers and speakers. We had one session on wellness training for activities that employees can do in their home offices to remain healthy. We had another on Blue Zone training to explore ways to live longer and better. Other courses have included body language and sales training.

Our main goal is to bring the company together to create interactivity among team members. We find renewed energy in most employees after these events. In our opinion, it is money well-spent.

Seeq Week 2019 Group Photo

Seeq Week 2019 Bike Build

Seeq Week Food Bank Move

Appendix F – Adding Remote Workers to Traditional Companies

Our recommendations only apply to startups or organizations that are fully officeless. We cannot ascertain for certain if our advice applies to adding officeless operations to traditional organizations with fixed locations. We notice that when companies add remote people, they leave them out of the decision loop. These employees tend to be lonelier, more disconnected, and have cyclical working motivation.

Most organizations have remote workers, such as sales teams, consultants, or freelancers, but they do not leverage them well. Their systems are not built to include them in the decision processes, so managers and leaders must go out of their way to remember to reach out to them. They are simply add-ons to the system.

Offshoring, the act of locating business functions in another county, is not much better. Many companies offshore services like development or technical support to reduce costs, but the mentality is usually to throw the work over the wall and hope for the best.

At Seeq, we want to hire the best talent possible. Moreover, we find that our virtual office allows us to maximize the efforts of individuals who have difficulty fitting into conventional work environments.

Appendix G – Maximizing Contributions from Neuroatypicals

Neurotypical is a term for someone who is relatively standard in the way they think and interact with the world. Neuroatypical people are those with some mental or behavioral disorder, such as mood and personality issues and various forms of autism. It has been observed that some highly technical talent have some characteristics on the neuroatypical spectrum.

One of our hidden benefits is that we believe that our setup provides an ideal way to get the maximum performance from neuroatypicals. One difficulty that some of these individuals experience is that they have a rough time with certain communication paths. Seeq's technology stack provides multiple ways to converse, providing a safe space for growth.

We have hired people who may have characteristics that make communicating difficult, but we explore options to overcome those hurdles. For example, we use more asynchronous messages because spontaneous, extemporaneous, or oral conversations may sometimes be off-putting. Over time, employees make progress as they become comfortable with team members and our process. The combination of asynchronous and synchronous discussions reinforces each other. We find it easier to adapt away from the weaknesses and toward the strengths of those working through challenges.

A critical part of that is controlling the environment. Rather than someone working in an office where people, noises, smells, lighting, or distractions could negatively impact performance or communication, a home environment grants better control of the surroundings. We notice that employees create a comfort zone that is conducive to effective communication and high performance. We see this time and time again and are proud that our virtual setup allows this to happen.

Although we are not certified psychologists, we observe that team satisfaction creates a constructive loop, and positive reinforcement works well for almost everyone. We believe that neuroatypicals have a difficult time receiving that feedback and support in a typical office environment, especially with all the distractions and disconnects. We see such employees find ways to work with their teams. Our observation is that our tools permit both the team and individuals to adapt until they develop a good workflow. As the individual maximizes their contributions, they receive positive reinforcement, and the cycle continues. We observe that the process results in hard workers who are productive contributors to the organization, which is a win-win for everyone. This is an area where virtual office environments have a chance to locate talent that might not otherwise be able to contribute in a traditional setting.

Appendix H – Applying Lessons Learned from Aircraft Simulations

At NASA, they use flight simulators to train pilots because they use a combination of muscle memory and learned behavior. In one case, they were investigating the implications of new technology to help in aerial dogfights. For their research, they used differential maneuvering simulators, which do not have physical emotions but extreme visual emotions. They brought in two fighter pilots and had them fight against each other as well as against computers. When they came out from the exercise, they were exhausted because they had been pulling gs, sweating, and on the verge of stalling.

The interesting point is that these were learned behaviors, muscle memories that their mind fooled them into thinking because there were no gs. It was merely a flat simulator with great visuals. As soon as they started the simulation, their bodies were so used to flying that they had the same sensations of actually being in the air.

When we used technicians who had never flown, they treated the simulation as a video game. In some cases, they beat the pilots and the computer, but they were not flying it like a plane. They did not sweat or have any of the other responses, and if they ever got into a plane, they would be unable to fly it. The cues people have impact what and how we do things.

CEO Steve Sliwa believes the simulator behavior exists with Qube, Seeq's virtual office simulator. "People who have worked in a traditional office where they walked down the hall and popped into various offices adapt to our environment very quickly. Qube is comforting to them, and they can instantly start creating casual meetings and inviting others because it feels natural."

About 30-40% of the time when we bring in recent graduates or interns, it takes time to build that because they do not have the training or muscle memory of working in an office cube. They do not have the expectations, so we have to make adjustments in these cases to close the gap. In one or two situations, new hires were unable to adjust to our workflow. One could argue that it was because they did not have enough experience in a conventional environment. It could have just as easily been performance-related, however, and would have also happened in a traditional setup. It is hard to say because we have so few low-performers and employees who leave that we do not have a statistical trend on that.