

Becoming a Remote Credit Worker

Not all jobs lend themselves to a remote working environment. Doctors can't perform surgeries, postal workers can't deliver mail and restaurant owners can't run a business, as each profession requires an environment equipped with the necessary tools to complete the work. Some believed this to be true for the business credit profession as well, limiting remote working to occasions such as customer visits. Now months into the Coronavirus pandemic, credit professionals are learning that working remotely is not only possible, but also beneficial in numerous ways.

According to multiple NACM surveys conducted since the onset of the outbreak, the majority of respondents agreed that working remotely wasn't common in the credit department prior to this year. In March, nearly 73% of more than 540 respondents said their departments were working remotely since the pandemic began—a significant increase from the 13% who said they worked remotely frequently or any time they wanted prior to that time. Several credit professionals from around the country said remote work is ongoing but remains a learning process.

CECO, Inc., Credit and Collections Manager Alaina Worden, CBF, said working anywhere outside the office was rare prior to COVID-19, only happening a handful of times each year. In fact, she was against working remotely over fears of being unable to monitor the department's progress. Some tasks remain a challenge, such as completing month-end close reports and KPI's, but Worden acknowledged that she has come to see many advantages.

"I am more engaged with my team. We have become a stronger, closer team as we work through this adversity that is set before us," she said, adding that some credit-related tasks have become easier, including reviewing and modifying credit policies and procedures, working on streamlining, and enhancing department roles to be as efficient as possible.

With less interruptions and a heightened focus, Worden said she has more discussions with the sales team in a meeting environment rather than one-off conversations, creating a positive change in the relationship between credit and sales.

As the North American director of credit management for Amer Sports Americas, Paul Amante, CCE, CICP, said "the nuts and bolts of credit and collection management are easily executed" with his computer and cell phone. Amante said he has experienced no difference in completing credit analyses, e.g., pulling reports, scoring accounts, making credit decisions on new or existing customers, when working remotely versus working in the office. Making collection calls is generally not a problem either, unless distractions from family arise. Tasks are neither easier nor more difficult, he noted, with only a few exceptions such as paper check processing and bank deposits.

"For checks sent to our office, instead of our lockbox where most payments go, we are sending one of our clerks into the office once per week with the single focus being to process mail and make a bank deposit," Amante said. "She is also taking care of any clerical work that needs to be done and then trying to get out of the office as quickly as possible."

Crawford Electric Supply Company, Inc. Credit Manager Anne Scarcella, CCE, CCRA, said it isn't necessarily the tasks that are difficult to complete as a remote worker, but more so having the discipline to step away from the desk at the end of the workday. Having worked remotely about 20% of the time prior to the pandemic, Scarcella said she was already equipped with everything she needed to perform

her job 100% outside of the traditional office setting. However, what's missing is the face-to-face interaction she once had with her credit and sales teams, an element that can't be replaced by programs like Zoom or Microsoft teams.

"I do miss the ability to walk over to sales and have a conversation with them regarding a customer or a problem," Scarcella said. "But I think remote work is the new normal. We have to do whatever is necessary to be able to effectively manage our teams and tasks. I think organizational skills and self-discipline are paramount to being successful working remotely."

—Andrew Michaels, editorial associate