Essential Tech for Telecommuting

Working at home means getting comfortable with some new tech. Here are some key problems you may face making the switch, the best tech to fix them, and links to the products I use myself. Props to my remote IT guy, Ric Lewallen for some great suggestions:

1. **My home internet is slow!**
   First, check to see if your broadband provider is giving you the speed you are paying for by plugging your laptop directly into one of your router's Ethernet ports and running a speed test at www.speedtest.net. If you have a cable modem and first subscribed years ago, you may need an equipment upgrade, or your router may be mis-configured. If your connection is good, run another speed test at the spot you'll be working from. If there's a big difference, the problem is in your home network or Wi-Fi. Easiest fix: run an Ethernet cable across the house and plug in your computer.

2. **How do I talk to a group at one time?**
   This is the realm of video and audio conferencing. Zoom, Skype and many others offer free video conferencing accounts (for limited numbers of people) or paid accounts that support larger groups. Another great solution is a telephone bridge line like FreeConference.com. Everyone just calls in—the account is free. They even have local numbers in many other countries, so you can talk to someone in Europe and the call is free on both ends.

3. **I don't have MS Office at home!**
   On Microsoft's Office 360 plans you can install it on multiple computers. So just download it and use your work log-in. Google Docs is a widely-used free option if you can't do the above.

4. **You don't have a backup plan**
   If you are using your own personal computer for work, you **need** a backup plan. Set up a free Dropbox account (you get 2GB of space) and put all the docs you are working on in your Dropbox folder—, and they'll automatically be saved to the cloud, plus you can share them or access them from a mobile device, too. Or Backblaze lets you back up your entire machine to the cloud in the background.

5. **Ergonomics**
   If you are working on a laptop all day off your dining table, your ergonomics are going to be terrible. The keyboard is too high, the monitor is too small, the touchpad is too cumbersome… Get yourself a full-size wireless mouse first (or a mouse/keyboard set to save a USB port. I've used this mouse for years), then a 24" or larger monitor (1080p or higher). It makes a huge difference— and at about $175 it's worth it even if you have to pay for it yourself. Try to get your keyboard down to more like 26" off the floor, too, and save your wrists.