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SAVE PRINT

How standing desks are improving productivity for small businesses

Gayle Bryant

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It's no longer unusual to see people [choosing to stand at their desks](#) rather than sit but does this make them happier and healthier?

There's no shortage of studies that suggest the standing option is healthier. One study, [Improving Worker Health: The Take-a-Stand Project](#), published in the *Preventing Chronic Disease* journal showed that back and neck pain was reduced by 54 per cent within four weeks of using a standing desk periodically throughout the day.



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Standing desks are proving a hit for small businesses. Photo: Yuri Arcurs

Other findings showed significant improvements in fatigue levels, vigour, tension, depression, confusion and overall mood in employees

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who used standing desks periodically throughout the day for a seven-week period. At the end of the study period, 75 per cent said they felt healthier, 62 per cent felt happier and 33 per cent felt less stressed.

Another study published in the *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* journal found standing after lunch, as opposed to sitting, could reduce blood sugar spikes by 43 per cent, which reduces the risk of diabetes.

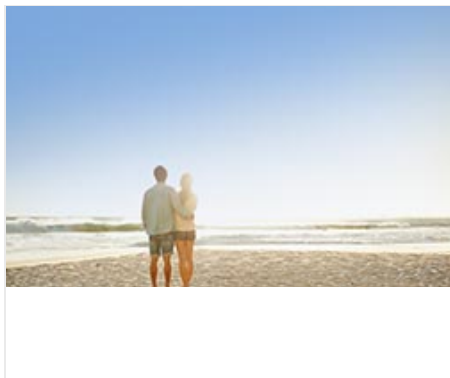


Sick leave has fallen after the introduction of standing desks at Infiniti Telecommunications. Photo: Supplied

There are two main types of standing desks: the standalone electronic desk and the units that sit on top of an existing desk, which can be manually adjusted.

Investing in standing

Peter Williams is director of telecoms company Infiniti Telecommunications, which sells installed phone systems. He introduced standing desks for his staff 18 months ago. "We started off with a couple to see how they went and then introduced them for all staff who wanted them," he said.



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Initially the company bought eight Varidesks, the type that sit on top of existing desks, for the head office and four for staff that worked from home. Williams says at the time the Varidesk was a cheaper option than replacing a person's existing desk.

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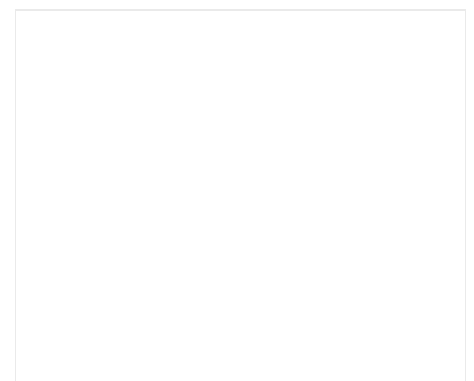
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"But recently we bought four electronic desks for new staff," he said. "We did the maths and decided that buying an e-desk would be about the same price or slightly cheaper as buying a normal desk with the Varidesk on top."



Jordan Lees is banking on standing desks for his business UpDown Desk. Photo: Supplied

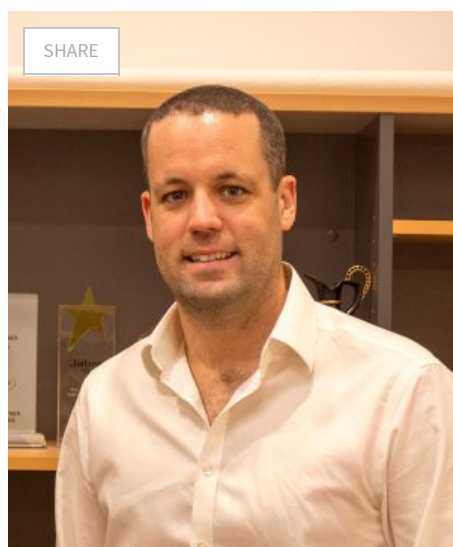
The Varidesks were about \$300 each and the e-desks \$700 each so Williams calculates he spent about \$6400.

The company has 20 staff and a turnover of under \$10 million a year. Since introducing the standing desks, Williams has seen a noticeable difference in his staff. "We've had about 5 per cent fewer sick days," he said. "Staff are happier and healthier. One of my employees said recently he liked the standing desks because they 'make the day go faster'."

Williams' staff can decide if they want a standing desk. "We asked who wanted one and nearly everyone put their hand up," he said. "And they're using them. On average they probably stand and sit down three to four times a day."

Making a business from standing desks

Jordan Lees is the founder of standing desk supplier, UpDown Desk. He is also a physiotherapist and occupational health and safety consultant. Lees started the business in January after becoming frustrated that the standing desks he was recommending to his clients were unaffordable.



Peter Williams has invested in standing desks at Infiniti Telecommunications. Photo: Supplied

“One of my employees said recently he liked the standing desks because they 'make the day go faster'.”

Peter Williams

"We approach our business from a health and safety perspective rather than a retail perspective," Lees said. "My aim is to help people alleviate the issues that develop from sitting in the same position for extended periods of time."

Until starting UpDown Desk, Lees worked as an ergonomic consultant for four years. His clients found noticeable improvements in health after using standing desks, especially around reductions in injuries.

"The number one health benefit, unless someone has an existing injury that prevents him or her from using a standing desk, is to help with injuries caused by overuse," he said. "These conditions are caused by being in a particular position for a prolonged period of time, which results in an accumulation of physical stress to one area."

Lees said the benefits of standing desks come from being able to switch positions – whether it's from sitting to standing or vice-versa.

"Just by changing your position you can change where the stress in your body is accumulating," he said.

He said there is no need to stand all day just because you have a standing desk. "As the majority of people who get standing desks have likely been sitting down for so long, it is a good idea to consider progressing gradually," Lees said. "Periodically switching from sitting to standing is sufficient to halt the accumulation of stresses associated with prolonged sitting."

And as standing desks become more popular, Lees believes statistics around their benefits will need to be taken into consideration by employers.

"As a physio and OHS consultant I want employees to be healthy, but I also want employers to be aware of their OHS obligations," Lees said. "As more statistics are released about the benefits of standing desks, employers won't be able to ignore their advantages and would be ill-advised to do so for fear of breaching their OHS obligations."

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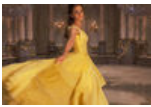
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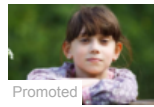
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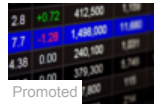
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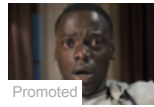
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