

Don't Let Distance Keep You Apart - Technology to stay in touch

Whether you're relocating to Australia or Zimbabwe, the distance and time differences separating you from the friends and family you leave behind are sure to make you feel isolated. Keeping in touch with loved ones can help to reduce the feeling of homesickness which is crucial when you first relocate.

Until recently, a move overseas really did feel like the other side of the world with people limited to just a few methods of communication. Nowadays, there is a wide variety of low cost, quick and user-friendly ways to maintain contact. Relocation industry expert Crown Relocations offers a simple guide to the technology available to you.

Internet phone calls – almost free!

Expensive international phone calls can be a thing of the past with the development of software such as Skype, which allows you to phone people through the internet. It means you can make free calls for as long as you like and, if they have a webcam, you will be able to see whoever you're talking to. What's more, it's not limited to specific countries – all you need is for both people to be using the same software.

Although it is free to download, using this technology is likely to incur a set-up cost if you don't already have an internet telephone, webcam or a microphone for your computer. However, if you don't have access to a microphone or an internet telephone, you can still use a webcam to see each other when you're typing messages.

Instant messaging – when everyone's online

Instant messaging (IM) is a real-time online conversation where you build up a network of contacts and write 'instant' messages to them. These are all private and you can invite more than one person to a conversation. Some IM providers even allow you to use a webcam at the same time.

IM services are hosted by most e-mail providers including - but not limited to - Yahoo!, Google Talk and MSN. You will generally need an e-mail address with the provider of the IM but once you've signed up, you will be able to link with any friends and family who also use the service. Given the nature of the conversation however, you will need to be online at the same time as your contacts.

Social networking websites – join the community

Social networking websites such as MySpace, Facebook and Bebo are online communities which allow you to connect with people around the world.

Depending upon which site you join, you can have real-time conversations with your online 'friends', send private messages and post comments onto your friends' pages. Importantly, you can also upload photos and videos onto your profile page for your contacts to see.

This is a useful way to share pictures of you, your family and your new location. Likewise, you will be able to see images of your loved ones so you can keep up to date with their lives too.

Blog your adventure

A blog is essentially an online diary which will allow you to write in-depth about what you're experiencing. Blogs are very popular with people who are travelling or relocating that want to update family and friends without having to write several e-mails or letters.

Family and friends can access your blog at their own time which means you don't need to work around any time differences. You can also link to other blogs so you can keep updated with any developments for your loved ones. Writing a blog is also a good way to jot down about what you are experiencing and how you are feeling, like you would with a diary or journal.

E-mails – when only a letter will do

If you can't get to grips with the other methods, an e-mail is just as personal as a letter but it arrives far more quickly! With internet access now a common feature on mobile phones, you'll also be able to access your e-mails on the go which means you won't need to be sat at a computer to get in touch with people.

Mobile phone calls and texting – there are cheaper rates

We are probably all guilty of taking our mobile phones for granted but they are crucial to our world's 24/7 communications and it's very likely you will keep in touch with friends and family using one. You will need to check with your current provider whether you can take your mobile phone with you and if you will need another number in your new location. Either way, you will be able to text your friends and family in the same way as before. International phone calls from mobiles can be expensive but there are specialist providers of calling cards who offer competitive rates.

With so many options available, it's worth thinking about what type of communication you're most likely to use on a regular basis. For example, if it's going to be inconvenient for you to maintain a blog then you will quickly lose interest in maintaining it. You should also think about the implications for those you'll be contacting; if you already have a webcam but your friends don't, they'll need to source one in order for you to see them online.

Fundamentally, you should choose whatever method is going to work best for you. Moving abroad can be difficult and emotionally challenging and it's these times when you'll rely on your loved ones for support.