Gousto to let staff work from abroad for a month each year, says meal kit unicorn's founder

S
o-called "Freedom Day" has left both management and staff eager for long-term certainty on flexi-working policies and office requirements – and meal kit provider Gousto has become the latest company to reveal significant changes.

Ministers lifted many of the UK's remaining Covid restrictions on Monday, including the "work from home if you can" directive.

Gousto chose the day to tell its more than 1,000 staff that it is to trial allowing them to work wherever they prefer for six months in order to "help teams maintain a healthy work-life balance, post lockdown".

Firm founder and CEO, Timo Boldt, also told staff that they will be able to "nomadic work" abroad for up to 30 days a year.

The idea is to enable staff to enjoy more travel opportunities, and to visit friends and family based outside the UK.

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Although the digital-focused firm's London HQ will reopen later this month, Boldt said there will be no minimum requirement for days in the office.

The tech-savvy recipe box subscription business, which was valued at more than $1 billion last November, bestowing it with "unicorn" status, said it will also have flexitime hours. Staff will work 10am-4pm, with a choice as to where else to make up the hours – a move aimed at helping working parents.

Boldt, a former financier who started out toiling long hours under artificial lighting himself, said: "We didn't grow into the business we are by clock-watching and we're not about to start now. With the right people and the right culture, no business should have to."

The founder added that he believes his teams can remain motivated and dedicated, "no matter where or when they are working".

It comes after a YouGov survey of more than 2,000 city-based British workers, commissioned by Virgin Media O2, found nearly half of the London white-collar workforce could be planning a "nomadic working" trip this summer.

Nearly 40% of capital-based employees surveyed told pollsters they were likely to trade in their home office for an alternative location somewhere in the UK in July or August, while almost three quarters of those surveyed told researchers they want the ability to work from a mixture of places going forward, be that at home, the office or elsewhere.

People said they like the flexibility of nomadic working and find they are more productive when getting regular exercise

and when able to travel whilst working.

Gousto has raised over £155 million in equity to date, with backers ranging from BGF, Britain's most active private company investor, to fitness guru Joe Wicks. It delivers nearly eight million meals per month after seeing demand soar in lockdowns.

Users can get Amazon Alexa to read you out instructions as you cook, and the company's latest partnership has seen it partner with Spotify to offer users meals matched via their music taste.

It already has a 200-strong tech team and plans to double its workforce this year to 2,000, with jobs open for head office roles in tech and data, and in its warehouses in Essex and Cheshire.

The firm said the expansion "will help the business keep up with continued demand".

Large employers from PWC to Experian have already told staff to expect just a few days a week in the office going forward, with the focus being on delivering for clients and bosses, rather than on presenteeism and "facetime".

A wide range of hospitality and leisure businesses are looking at how to capitalise on the opportunity to entice in a much larger pool of desk-based customers during the day, from "work from pub" deals, to the expansion of firms such as WeWork and Soho House in cities and towns around the world.

Chains including Costa have already launched designated areas for remote workers, complete with 'desk' spaces divided by screens and a power socket.