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CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

# Take a stand on desks that work for you and your tech

## Hands on



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Remember when so many people around you had signed up for a smartphone that you couldn't ignore them any more?

That's how it became for us with stand-up desks. It wasn't that most people were switching to an upright working stance – far from it.

But enough of our acquaintances had crossed over that we had to know whether there was anything in it. It turns out that there just may be.

Tall desks have been around for decades, and these days you can get motorised models that convert from conventional to stand-up and back again with the push of a button.

When we found a Melbourne legal identity not known for eccentric

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behaviour (OK, he keeps ferrets as apartment pets, but nobody's entirely normal) using a stand-up, it was intriguing.

But the crunch was during a tour of the new office of mobile messaging specialist MessageMedia, where all staff are afforded a convertible desk, with monitors on adjustable arms to assure ideal positioning. About a third of the team was upright when we were there.

Chief executive Stuart Marburg told us that the option of stretching backs and legs has proved very popular and he singled out programmers as particular fans.

Because the table-tops can be raised to any level, they can accommodate tall, mediums and shorts, as well as seated. So we decided to test drive the trend for ourselves.

We weren't prepared to gamble \$1500 on the experiment, or to haul our current furniture out of the room. We

decided on Varidesk, a manually operated unit that sits atop a conventional desk and converts it into a standing desk.

Credit where it's due, Varidesk is beautifully engineered. Our computing kit consists of a 27-inch iMac, paired with a 27-inch Thunderbolt display.

That's a shade over 20 kilograms all up.

We chose the \$575 48-inch model since that's the only one rated to carry that much weight. No self-assembly is required, a blessing for those of us that regard Ikea as torture.

Just unpack the unit, clear the desktop, and get a friend to help you lift the Varidesk into place. Replace your gear on top, and you're ready to go.

We'd watched the YouTube videos of smiling users breezily switching from sitting position to standing, with their equipment gliding easily up and down.

Could it really be so simple to shift 20 kilograms of computers?

The answer, thanks to Varidesk's engineering gnomes, is yes. It's simply no big deal to raise or lower the platform. We admit we were anxious the first few times we saw nearly \$5000 in high-tech kit rise upwards, but before long it was obvious that the desk was up to the task. All that was left was to discover whether working on our feet was a plus or a silly fad.

The verdict: we like it. Hundreds of web articles assert the health benefits of getting off your tail and onto your toes, but we'll leave the medical assessment to experts. We feel better spending more of the day on our feet.

The most ergonomic chair feels unnatural and even uncomfortable after an extended period.

Standing can also become tiring, but then you just lower the desk and take a seat. Across a typical day, we choose to be upright about half the time.

Varidesk may not be for everyone. Since there are only two height options, it might not suit a user under about 165

centimetres or much over 180 centimetres. Because it doesn't lift your entire desktop, you need to rearrange items like phones, peripherals and notepads, and that may not work well.

And although the unit is strong and stable, it isn't designed to support a user who needs to rest their elbows and a good amount of body weight when they stand.

For us, none of those potential negatives have proven a problem. We get a concentration boost from varying our posture and making more use of the major muscles of our upper legs.

The dead giveaway that we were sitting too much was lower back

stiffness on rising. After an hour at a standing desk our feet know it, but our back feels fine. This is a trial product that's here to stay.

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