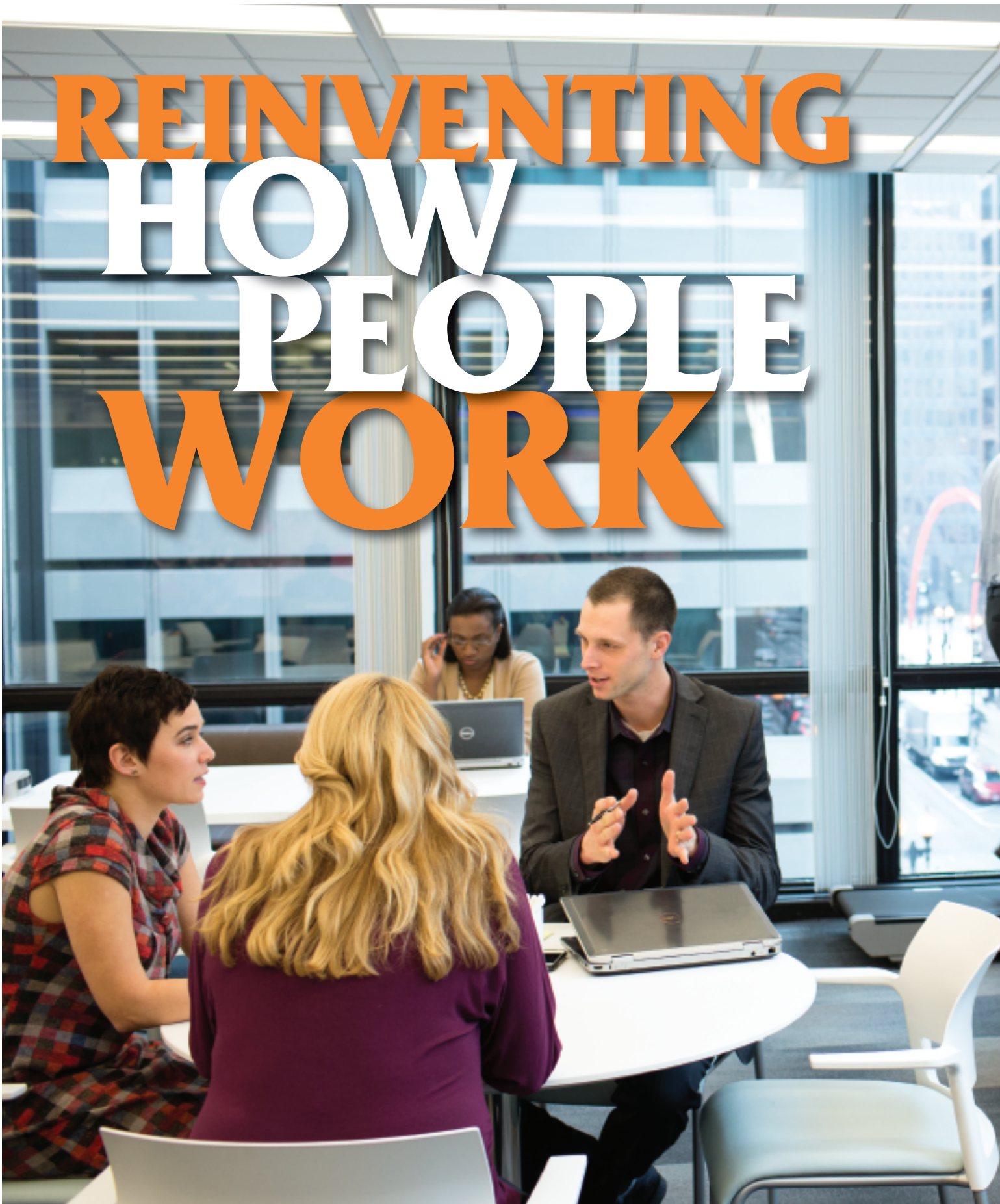


# REINVENTING HOW PEOPLE WORK



A photograph of a modern coworking office. Three people are working at desks. One man in a light blue shirt is standing and looking at a laptop. Another man in a maroon sweater is sitting and working on a laptop. A woman with long blonde hair is sitting at a desk in the foreground, also working on a laptop. The office has large windows overlooking a city skyline. The lighting is bright and natural.

## HOW COWORKING HAS CROSSED INTO THE MAINSTREAM AS A VIABLE WAY FOR PROFESSIONALS TO DO BUSINESS.

BY LISA HORN, CAS

**T**ODAY'S PROMOTIONAL PROFESSIONAL can do business anytime, anywhere. With technology—from electronic catalogs and product search tools, online ordering systems, apps, social media and ever-present email—the modern salesperson isn't confined to the four walls of a traditional office; rather, he or she has the flexibility to office anywhere.

**Pictured:** Workspring Central Loop in Chicago, Illinois, offers concierge services, high performance wifi, digital displays, work tools and supplies, snacks, beverages and more. [www.workspring.com](http://www.workspring.com).

PHOTO BY PAUL ELLEDGE PHOTOGRAPHY



However, for small companies, leasing office space and incurring all the related expenses is often cost prohibitive. While working from a home office saves precious money that can be used for operating capital, marketing expenditures or business development, it has its disadvantages. Working from a home office often prohibits hosting client meetings, there's a lack of social interaction with peers—and the distractions! It seems there's always a load of laundry that will interrupt your productivity.

Renting an executive suite can be a more economical choice, and it offers a professional work environment with traditional office amenities. However, these spaces often feel like working in a closet (sensory deprivation!) and there's little social interaction. Going to a coffee shop is fine for the occasional work excursion, but they're often noisy and distraction-filled.

Enter coworking: a shared working experience that combines a professional, yet aesthetically inspiring work environment with a community for like-minded business people.

### What Is Coworking And How Can You Benefit?

Coworking is a mobile working strategy that offers a friendly, comfortable working environment with all the amenities of a typical company setting without the high price and long-lease terms of traditional office space. It brings professionals of all disciplines together to work independently on their own projects yet have the support and community of being in an office with other working individuals.

The idea is simple, according to the Coworking Wiki at [wiki.coworking.org](http://wiki.coworking.org): “Independent professionals and those with workplace flexibility work better together than they do alone. Coworking spaces are about community-building and sustainability. Participants agree to uphold the values set forth by the movement's founders, as well as interact and share with one another. We are about creating better places to work and, as a result, a better way to work.”

From independent-distributor business owners to supplier and multi-line sales reps who travel extensively in territories away from the home office, many promotional professionals find themselves working



**The MAKERS Space in downtown Seattle, Washington, is a 7,000-square-foot coworking space overlooking the iconic Elliott's Bay. [www.themakersspace.com](http://www.themakersspace.com).** PHOTO BY WILL FOSTER

in relative isolation. Coworking allows them to have a professional work environment and a community of peers that they wouldn't experience in a home office or hotel suite.

Keep in mind that coworking isn't only for small promotional firms and road warriors. Coworking gives larger industry employers more flexibility when employing talent outside their geographic areas. This allows for growth beyond the company's headquarters, which is especially helpful when opening new territories or while start-up staff is small. Additionally, coworking gives larger companies an opportunity to retain top employees who need to relocate (because of a spouse's new job or to be closer to family) and know the employee is properly set up to work.

Being surrounded by a group of highly focused, energetic and creative people with a strong business sense is often the much-needed spark independent professionals need to grow their career. “Coworking spaces typically place a high value on building a healthy working community, which means you can't sleep at your desk there anymore than you can at work,” writes Natalie Burg in a *Forbes* article, “Coworking: A Middle

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## COWORKING: THE BACKSTORY

WHEN BERNIE DEKOVEN COINED the term “coworking” in 1999, he was describing a phenomenon he called “working together as equals.” But as he somewhat reluctantly learned, the whole idea was a lot more revolutionary than he had naively assumed.

“For the most part, people don't work together as equals, especially not in the business world where they are graded and isolated, categorized and shuffled into a hierarchy that separates them by rank and salary level; creating, for the majority of employees, an indelibly competitive relationship which, even when they find themselves members of the same team, is rife with distrust, duplicity and often downright sabotage,” he states on his

website [Deepfun.com](http://www.deepfun.com).

The concept of coworking created an entirely different approach to working together. Technology is used to support collaborative work, and the environment is designed to allow coworkers to work together, as equals, yet “work separately—each working on their own projects, pursuing their own separate business interests,” Dekoven says. “In this way, people are free to help each other without worrying about competitive pressures. And the result is productivity, community and, surprisingly often, deeply shared fun.”

Source: <http://www.deepfun.com/fun/2013/08/the-coworking-connection/>

# THE RIGHT FIT: What Do You Need In A Coworking Space?

WHILE MANY COWORKING FACILITIES are targeted toward the tech crowd and startups, there are options to fit a variety of personalities and professional needs. Look at how you work today. Ask yourself the following questions to determine your needs and identify how you'd like to work moving forward:

## Workspace

- Do you travel a lot and just need an occasional workspace, or do you need a dedicated daily desk?
- Do you like an open, communal workspace or private office?
- Will you hold client meetings and need conference room space?
- Are quiet rooms available when you need to take a phone call?
- Do you want a lounge space with comfy couches and chairs?
- Do you want an open-feeling environment with glass walls and lots of natural light, or do you prefer a more traditional office with solid walls and doors?
- Is outdoor working space an option when the weather is nice?
- Do you need event space to hold larger gatherings?
- Does the space appeal to you aesthetically?
- Will the space enhance your creativity and productivity?



## Technology

- What type of bandwidth is offered? (Fiber optic offers the fastest download speeds.)
- Do you need a landline phone with voicemail capabilities?
- Are printers, faxes, scanners, copiers and office supplies included or available?

## Amenities

- Do you need traditional business hours or 24/7 access?
- Can you use the facility as a business mailing address?
- Is there a receptionist to greet visitors?
- Is there a coffee bar for refreshments, or is kitchen with a fridge and microwave available when you want to eat more than just a snack?
- Is locked private storage (file cabinet, locker) available?
- Do you want a gym, yoga studio or locker room on-site?

## Social

- Is there a social director who plans regularly scheduled networking events?
- Are professional development classes offered?
- Are there any scheduled physical activities (yoga or bootcamp classes, for example)?
- Is there a mentoring program?

## Location & Transportation

- Is it centrally located with restaurants nearby?
- Is there ample free parking?
- If you live in a city with public transportation, is it near subway, train or bus routes?
- If you bike to work, is there on-site equipment storage?



## Fees

- Can you pay month-to-month or is a lease required?
- Is there a sliding scale for how you work (common working space is less expensive than a dedicated desk, for example)?
- Do you have unlimited access or are you restricted to a predetermined number of hours/days per month?
- Is there a limit to the number of coworkers accepted per location (to ensure there is space for you when you need it)?
- Is the facility part of a cooperative where you can use other designated locations across the country as a part of your membership?

# Coworking Works For Corporate Specialties

WHEN VALERIE HAYMAN SKLAR, CAS, president of Detroit-based Corporate Specialties, began looking into coworking in the fall of 2013, she wasn't sure what to expect. But something about Grand Circus (grandcircus.co), a training institute that's on a mission to elevate the tech community in the heart of downtown Detroit, Michigan, drew her in.

"After being in my home office for eight years, I wanted to be a more active participant in the community," she says. "By coworking at Grand Circus, I'm finding there is excitement ... an excitement about being a part of the revitalization of Detroit. I look forward to going to work; there's a positive energy that feeds on itself—and that's something that can't happen when working solo."



**Valerie Hayman Sklar, CAS,**  
president of distributor  
**Corporate Specialties,**  
works out of Grand Circus  
in downtown Detroit,  
Michigan.

Coworking has also been great for business. Since she began coworking, Hayman has picked up six new clients in the Detroit area and a couple of referrals—all in her first six months. "Some are from the coworking space, some are from the office building next door, some are from the seminar at which I spoke. Word of mouth has been great," she says.

Hayman Sklar, a 17-year promotions industry veteran, got involved with the Grand Circus community immediately by attending the regularly scheduled "Madison Block" brainstorming sessions where community members share challenges and crowdsource feedback. "Most of my coworking peers are tech companies, so it is really interesting to see what their thought process is and how they go about building their companies," she says. "For example, what they think marketing is versus what I think marketing is may not always be the same. Seeing how the new generation talks about marketing and being able to learn about their views is extremely valuable. I can take what I've learned and work that into how I develop and grow my business in the future."

In addition to attending events, Hayman Sklar has also been a facilitator. In November 2013, not long after joining the community, she was asked to host a "Brain Exchange," an interactive brown bag lunch on the topic of marketing with promotional products. In addition to sharing ideas on how small businesses can market themselves, she also received valuable feedback from the audience about what marketing challenges they face, which will help her develop future marketing programs for her clients.

But organized education sessions aren't the only way insight is shared; casual conversations around the coworking space can be just as enlightening. "Whenever I have samples sent in, people always come over and ask what's up," she explains. "I offer to let them test out the products, which gives me feedback that I wouldn't have otherwise received. It's a whole different perspective on what I'm doing."

While Hayman Sklar has seen her productivity rise ("I get more done in five hours coworking than I did in eight hours in the home office," she says) as well as orders come in from fellow coworkers, the real benefit is far more intangible. "Experiencing everything that's going on in Detroit is infectious," she says. "When you're with people who are inspired, you don't see a bankrupt city; you see a phoenix rising from the ashes. Being part of a coworking space, I feel inspired to be part of what's going on—and I want to continue doing more."—LH



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Ground For Remote Workers.” “They also automatically fulfill a psychological need employees often have to get into a productive mindset.”

Productivity is one of the main advantages coworkers experience. In fact, 71 percent of respondents to the third Global Coworking Survey conducted by Deskmag.com said their creativity had increased since joining, and 62 percent said their standard of work had improved. Countering the common claim that coworking spaces can be distracting, 68 percent said they were better able to focus, as compared to 12 percent who said the opposite. And 64 percent said they could better complete tasks on time.

Another benefit, albeit often intangible, is the certain amount of serendipity that happens when coworking: being able to ask for feedback, get advice or receive help solving a problem that you wouldn't otherwise get in your home office. “While each coworking member represents a different industry with different challenges, they work together to brainstorm issues just like any other coworkers,” says Dave Nelson, Workantile co-owner, in the *Forbes* article. “You can take any set of educated, competent human beings and they will be able to solve problems together. And none of us are competing for a promotion.”

While you can compare the tangible amenities of the coworking spaces in your area, one of the most important criteria in your decision is the intangible vibe the coworking space emits from the collection of professionals who work there.

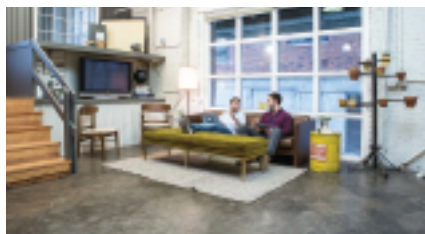
“A great co-working space is a collection of minds inspired by the brand that brought them together,” writes Rameet Chawla (@rameet) in an article in *Entrepreneur*, “What’s the Top Benefit of Co-Working Spaces?” As the founder of the Fueled Collective, a coworking space comprised of more than 25 startups in downtown Manhattan, Chawla says that members of coworking groups should “benefit from the brand that creates the space, the ethos it aspires to and the people it attracts. The knowledge and experience of your peers and small, informal interactions around the printer can spark new ideas. These unstructured exchanges that take place at the coffee machine are the real amenities.”

Pricing for coworking spaces runs from about \$10 to \$60 per day and from about \$100 to \$600 and up per month depending on location, square footage and amenities.

### Finding Success: Getting Involved With Your Coworking Community

Starting to work at a coworking facility shouldn't be intimidating, but it's natural to be a bit nervous going into a new situation where the norms, culture and policies are unfamiliar. Is it okay to hand out business cards? When and where is it appropriate to strike up conversation? What is acceptable behavior when taking a phone call?

When signing up to be a member of a community, talk to the founder or community representative about house rules so you can act



**Coworkers at The MAKERS Space in Seattle, Washington, get access to premium business amenities, conference rooms, telephone booths, a large presentation kitchen and comfortable lounge area.**  
[www.themakersspace.com](http://www.themakersspace.com).

PHOTOS BY WILL FOSTER

accordingly. And if you're unsure in any situation, just ask. Most are friendly and willing to help. Just make sure that you're not in constant sales mode while there. While sales may come in time as a part of the networking opportunities, don't go into coworking expecting them. Being seen as a pushy salesperson can be a real turnoff in any community.

Once comfortable in your new surroundings, look for ways to get involved. Unlike companies with traditional hierarchies, you don't need permission from a “boss” to get help with something or implement a cool idea. Coworking spaces belong to everyone—no seniority required. Be confident, start conversations and get to know your fellow coworkers. If there are planned networking or social events, go to them immediately. The quicker you build your social circle, the quicker you'll begin to feel at home.

**To get the most out of your coworking membership, see these guides from Deskmag.com and Inc. magazine:**

<http://www.deskmag.com/en/how-to-get-the-most-out-of-your-coworking-membership>

<http://www.inc.com/guides/2010/11/how-to-get-the-most-out-of-your-coworking-space.html>

### Decision Time: Is Coworking Right For You?

Coworking isn't for everyone. So how do you know if it's right for you? Schedule a tour and talk to a community manager. Most facilities have a free day pass so you can experience what they have to offer and meet other community members. Take advantage of the free day to see what it is truly like to work there. Talk to others and find out what they like (and don't like) about the facility. By the end of the day, you'll have a sense of the vibe and if you want to be a part of the community.

**To find coworking space in your area, check out these directories:**

[www.desktimeapp.com/directory](http://www.desktimeapp.com/directory)

[wiki.coworking.com/w/page/29303049/Directory](http://wiki.coworking.com/w/page/29303049/Directory)

Coworking may simply be a welcome respite from your home office, but then again it may revolutionize your entire business. The only way to know is give it a try. **FPB**

*Lisa Horn, CAS, a 19-year industry veteran and former editor of PPB, is a regular contributor to industry publications and is a Founding Chef and editor-in-chief of PromoKitchen. Also known as @ThePublicityGal, she works with suppliers, distributors and industry service providers on their publicity, content marketing, blogging, catalog, social media and strategic communication efforts. Connect with her at <http://www.linkedin.com/in/lisakhorn> and <http://www.facebook.com/lisakhorn.biz>, or visit <http://thepublicitygal.com>.*