



All Together Now!

Coworking trend sweeps Boulder County

By Jane Palmer

Boulder has more start-ups than any other city in the U.S., according to a study last year by the Kauffman Foundation. But some of those start-ups are pretty lean—one or two people, no office space and a stringent budget. So just where do all those entrepreneurs work? Or the freelancers and contractors who come to the Front Range to live the Colorado lifestyle without being tied to a 9-to-5 job?

At home is one possibility. But while working at home cuts office costs and means you need never change out of your PJs, it comes with its own

disadvantages: children underfoot, ovens that suddenly demand to be cleaned when you're suffering project inertia, and a nonexistent boundary between work and home.



The Studio, Boulder

For entrepreneur Shelle Pourmanafzadehardabili, who started the marketing company Viseate in 2013, working at home in the mountains presented some unique challenges. “The Internet would go down so I couldn’t access my emails, and messages would pile up on my cell phone,” she says. “It once took two days to trap a rabbit that found its way into my home and wanted to nest.”

Another alternative is to head to the coffee shops or bookstores, but this can mean cramped (or no) desk space, loud conversations and a daily battle for power outlets. “Between the espresso machines, clinking dishes and general customer noise, it’s pretty hard to concentrate in a coffee shop,” says Kit Seeborg, who has been an independent digital media producer for 12 years.

Like-minded Communities

Enter coworking—communal spaces designed for

working either alone or in groups. In the last few years, coworking spaces have been popping up around Boulder County, and a quick tour of the facilities proves they've become very popular. Jeans-clad or dressed in business casual, workers young and old stare intensely at their screens, or chat earnestly on outdoor patios. From talking to coworkers, the advantages appear to be numerous. Less isolation, fewer distractions and a clear division between work and home seem to be the most common reasons people gravitate to coworking.

"You meet a variety of people passionate about what they are doing, with a variety of experiences," says Pourmanafzadehardabili, who now coworks at The Riverside (formerly Fuse) in Boulder. "Going from a company of 10,000-plus employees to just me"—and no rabbits so far—"I find community without politics in coworking space."



The Riverside, Boulder

But there are also those who turn to coworking to provide more than just a place to work outside the home. Some are looking for inspiration, or opportunities to network and even collaborate. "In coworking spaces, especially those with a shared interest or ethos, serendipity happens on a regular basis," says Seeborg, who has a membership at Boulder's Impact Hub. "It speeds up the process of

building relationships knowing that you have a shared set of values or priorities.”

Coworking facilities have been quick to foster such like-minded communities. Longmont’s TinkerMill (pictured at top of story) caters to hands-on creatives, Lafayette’s Confluence Coworking caters to techies, and Boulder’s Impact Hub calls itself a place where you can “accelerate your business forward while making the world a better place.”

So whether you’re a Lycra-clad millennial perched with your laptop on a yoga ball, or a Gen-X suit-wearer who likes to spread your papers across a large mahogany table, when it comes to finding somewhere to cowork in Boulder County, you’re likely to find not just your place, but your tribe.

Choosing a coworking space

If you decide to go the coworking route, the big question is where? Do you want to be with the hip, entrepreneurial downtown set or do you prefer something more old-school? Here are a few tips to help you decide:

Get clear on what you want

Do you simply want a professional work environment, or is it a workplace community that you are looking for? Figuring out exactly what you want from coworking is the essential first step in choosing your ideal venue.

Identify your ideal environment

Some people can’t tolerate a pin dropping when they’re trying to meet a deadline, while others only

get into their groove when they feel the bustle of daily life going on around them. To identify your ideal working environment, ask yourself how much desk space you need, whether you'd love that Flatirons view or it simply makes you wish you were outside, and whether you can tolerate the sound of other people's clicking keyboards and streaming music.

Cogitate the costs

Always a consideration for the freelancer or small-business owner is just how much you are willing to invest in office space. Most facilities offer various tiers of membership tailored to different budgets, and can start as affordably as \$200 a month for "floating" desk space (you park your computer where you find an empty tabletop each day). Such memberships still include Internet, coffee and educational trainings, but paying more can buy you a permanent desk, meeting space when needed, and various other perks such as access to on-site gyms or an Ecopass.

Find your peeps

If building a workplace community and networking feature high on your reasons for coworking, think carefully about whom you'd want to share your office with. Several coworking spaces attract distinct groups—computer programmers, creatives, designers, entrepreneurs, for example—leaving you only to decide whether you want to meet people who are in a line of business similar to yours or refreshingly different.

Commitment or flexibility?

Some venues offer full-time-only options whereas others accommodate people who prefer to work,

and pay, on a part-time basis. Some packages buy you assigned desk and locker space, while others may entail playing musical chairs every day. Choosing the best option depends on your budget, the nature of your work (try lugging that full-screen monitor around every day) and how much coworking time you need.

Location, location

Maybe all you care about is the length of your commute, or perhaps you think the right community is worth a longer trip. The good news is that coworking spaces are pretty evenly spread throughout Boulder County, meaning that most of us don't have to travel far to get some focused work done and beat isolation.

Overwhelmed by your options? Just try them out. Nearly all coworking facilities offer a free day's trial.

Jane Palmer, a freelance writer and radio producer, lives in Eldorado Springs with her husband and daughter.



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