

Premierline
BUSINESS INSURANCE

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The Premierline guide to

Co-working

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Foreword

One of the most important aspects of owning a business is having a tangible and well-equipped place from which to run it. Although many SMEs across the UK conduct business from the comfort of the home office, it may not always be the best location to achieve your business goals.

Today, independents and entrepreneurs are becoming more connected than ever before with collaboration and sharing growing all around us. Advances in technology and the ability to access information from almost anywhere with an internet connection has given rise to the phenomenon of co-working – the idea of sharing one work space with a number of different companies.

This co-working guide aims to help small business owners decide whether their business could run effectively and benefit from being based in a co-working space. It provides professional information and opinions on what to consider when choosing a space and the main benefits it could bring to your business operation.

Gary Skipworth, Premierline Director



What are co-working spaces?

“Broadly, co-working is all about what kind of a place you want to work in. It’s really down to whether you simply want a place or desk to work from or if you are looking for support, training or access to shared services.”

Sara Turnbull
Bootstrap Company



Isolation is a challenge that many small business owners face. Although working from home can have its benefits, home office spaces can become distracting and uninspiring. So what is the solution if you can’t afford to spend a substantial amount of money to rent an office of your own?

Walk into any city centre coffee shop and you’ll find a host of people working on laptops, tablets and smartphones. This is the simplest form of co-working: the idea of individuals or groups from different businesses working together in the same area.

Co-working spaces (or hubs) take this concept further, creating an entire workplace community for individuals and small businesses to work in, with emphasis on encouraging the sharing of ideas, knowledge and experience.

Sara Turnbull is the founder of the [Bootstrap Company](#) – a social enterprise which supports small businesses and young entrepreneurs in London - and co-chairs The London Open Workplace Providers Group, *“Broadly, co-working is all about what kind of a place you want to work in. It’s really down to whether you simply want a place or desk to work from or if you are looking for support, training or access to shared services.”*

The beauty of co-working is that each space is unique and will have an appeal which attracts a certain demographic. At the end of 2014, there were nearly 6000 co-working space available around the world with around 300,000 people using them.¹

¹ <http://www.deskmag.com/en/these-major-coworking-conferences-events-barcamps-will-take-place-in-2015>

Why is co-working popular?

Driven by technology enablement, the growth of online and creative industries coupled with generational change, co-working has moved from a niche market to a fully-fledged alternative to the traditional office.

“Technology has enabled people to work away from the office and for an increasing number of individuals and businesses, work is no longer a physical or fixed place.” explains Philip Dodson, Director of [@WorkHubs](#) in London.

The growth of micro businesses and self-employment is also a distinct factor in the success of co-working environments. Out of the 5.4 million businesses operating in the UK currently, 95% of them are micro businesses, employing between 0 and 9 people.²

“In London alone, over 50% of businesses are SMEs which is a very significant number and they are a really important part of the economy. That’s why we think it’s crucial to provide small businesses with affordable and flexible workspaces.” says Sara Turnbull.

The need for affordable workspaces is on the rise and a recent survey by QualitySolicitors revealed that nearly three quarters of small and micro business owners said that a flexible co-working space would be a business priority in the future.³

Did you know?

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DeskMag co-working magazine

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[@WorkHubs](#)



What are the benefits of co-working?

“Getting out of the house and working in a productive environment is the best part of co-working. The freedom of it really benefits your work-life balance.”

Sara Turnbull
Bootstrap Company

Connect with people

The value of co-working is in the relationships, far more than the resources. There are opportunities to speak to a range of businesses and individuals, all at different levels within their business and enterprise progression.

“Small business owners tend to struggle with things [within business] that they aren’t sure about, so co-working provides them with a community of people who can answer their questions and give them tangible advice.” says Philip

Being a member of a co-working space is extremely beneficial for those seeking business and skill collaboration opportunities too.

“If you need a task done that is outside of your skill set, there is likely somebody in your co-working space who can help you out.” adds Philip.

A cost effective option

The flexibility of co-working spaces means that facilities, desk and office spaces are available on a monthly membership fee with no long-term commitments required. Some spaces even offer hourly and daily drop-in rates so you can choose your lease terms depending on your business needs.

Work-life balance

Moving into a space that is dedicated for work could give both your productivity and work-life balance a real boost and help you maintain a sense of consistency and rhythm.

“Getting out of the house and working in a productive environment is the best part of co-working. The freedom of it really benefits your work-life balance, you can leave your work at work and focus on your home life separately.” says Sara.

A DeskMag survey revealed that 60% of co-workers felt more relaxed at home since working in a co-working environment.⁴

Office amenities

One of the greatest appeals of co-working is that it’s a work ready environment – as soon as you need it. Amenities such as printing facilities, meeting rooms and kitchen spaces provide the essentials that you need to run your business.

Many spaces go above and beyond this threshold, offering additional services and facilities from cafes, bars and free car parking to sound booths, editing suites and industry specific machinery.

⁴ <http://www.deskmag.com/en/what-coworking-space-members-want-survey-211>

What is co-working really like?

DESIGN FOR DIGITAL

designfordigital.com

Lawrence Tilley is the Director of [Design for Digital Ltd](#), a company creating websites and managing online presence for Small to Medium Enterprises in the UK. The company is based in The Guild in Bath.

“Co-working is a great opportunity for my business to seek not only prospective SME clients but connect with a network of businesses and sole traders who are members here to help in all aspects of my business; from accountancy, sales training, development, or even specialist niches. Also having members to bounce ideas off in the co-working space who aren't necessarily involved in my business is invaluable.”

“Occasionally when clients visit for meetings, some find the space more relaxed compared to their usual office environment. Once they're acquainted with the benefits the co-working space has to offer, they often look into membership for themselves.”

“I love being based at MediaCityUK as it is a location that I find hugely inspiring and energising, and a shared working space is great for me as I am at my best when I'm surrounded by other people. I don't view myself as a freelancer, I view myself as a business - albeit a small one - and I like to have a professional base that reinforces that for me.”

“I can get distracted by interesting conversations around me, but that is when headphones (and the right Spotify playlist) can be helpful at times.”



Ian Pettigrew is the Director of [Kingfisher Coaching](#), a company providing leadership development programmes, team development and coaching. Ian runs his company from The Landing in Manchester's MediaCity.

Choosing a co-working space

For many companies – particularly SMEs – the traditional office model isn't always an ideal working environment anymore. Individuals and businesses alike now understand the positive impact of community-based work spaces and the co-working phenomenon is a product of this new way of thinking.

By definition, co-working spaces are shared communal offices where people from different organisations and businesses go to work and share their ideas and business knowledge with one another. They provide flexible, creative and affordable space, with global membership due to grow by 40% year on year until 2018⁵.

If you're considering making a move from the home office, take a look at the following guidance which has been developed in association with some of the founders, managers and directors of the UK's most popular co-working spaces to determine if a co-working environment is right for you and your business.



Did you know?

Co-working membership is due to grow by 40% globally over the next 4 years.

Is the location right?

Location is one of the easiest ways to narrow down your search. Whether you're working alone or alongside a team – the location of your co-working space needs to be easy to commute to and close to your target market. You should research into areas of growth with good digital infrastructure but be careful not to fall into the trap of only searching in popular areas – this could lead to higher rental costs. As many co-working spaces are located in towns and city centres, you should also consider if the travel cost and commute is worthwhile to the amount of time that you will spend using the space.

Adam Richards from the [Camden Collective](#) says that the location you choose can also say a lot about your business. *“Location is hugely important. Apart from the easily quantifiable things like the length of your commute, there are other things, like the quality of places to drink, eat – and - less it be said, reputation that the location will say about your company. The location you choose will say a lot more about the values of your company than anything else to do with your space.”*

Whether its train stations, tube stops, eateries and bars or something else that you want or need in close proximity, location is key so ask the workspace owner about close by facilities.

Choosing a co-working space

Who are you sharing your space with?

Each co-working space feels and acts differently, so before deciding where you want to set up, you should look at the list of current occupants and ask if they may be able to help you in your business development.

Surrounding yourself with individuals and businesses with the same practices and ambitions as you allows you to learn from each other – you may even go into business together.

James Abbott-Donnelly tells us how tenants in [Duke Studios](#) in Leeds find it beneficial to work in a sector-specific environment, *“A lot of people just want to be around others who are working on something similar to them. You find that the natural networking aspect of co-working just happens in this kind of environment.”*

While some spaces offer desks for certain business types, others prefer to house a range of businesses from different sectors. This type of environment could help you to gain insights and knowledge that you may not find in a homogenous space.

Adam explains that combining a mixture of businesses can make a better working environment with less competition, *“We don’t ever want two of the same businesses. We don’t want a room of people all chasing the same investor because we don’t think it makes a productive place to work. Finding out who else works from the space should be one of the first things you ask.”*

What comes with the deal?

Co-working spaces are often portrayed as laid-back recreational areas with foosball tables, unlimited free coffee and fitness rooms. In a survey conducted by DeskMag, only 25% of co-workers considered recreational facilities such as these to be important⁶. So don’t jump at the idea of luxury amenities, it’s important to consider the more practical things first.

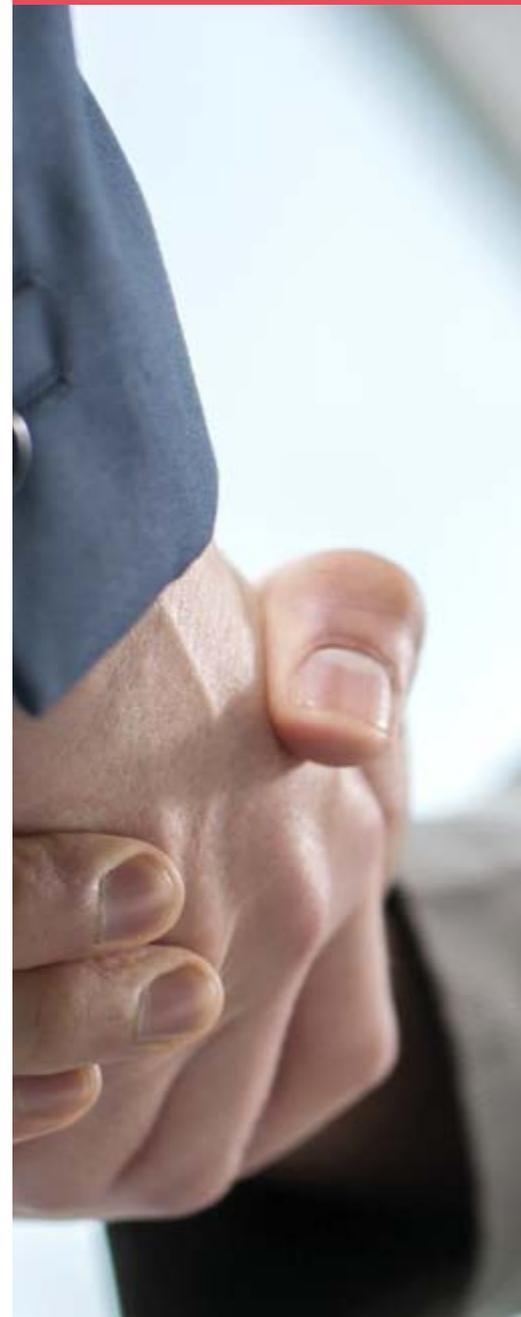
Tom Lewis, founder of [The Guild](#) in Bath explains that business-related facilities have proven to be the most sought-after element, *“We realised quickly that the bells and whistles such as table football and ping pong tables are a waste of time. It makes the place look good but ultimately people are here to work, so you’ll find that things like internet speed and conference rooms are much more important when searching for a space”*

You should consider the things that you need to conduct your day to day business including mail services, printing facilities, eating and food prep areas and access to meeting rooms. Be sure to make yourself aware of any additional fees that may apply before using these services.

Beside this, co-working hubs may also offer industry specific machines and services such as editing suites and sound booths, so take the time to look into any specialist facilities on offer – but be aware of additional costs.

“A lot of people just want to be around others who are working on something similar to them. You find that the natural networking aspect of co-working just happens in this kind of environment.”

James Abbott-Donnelly
Duke Studios



⁶ <http://www.deskmag.com/en/what-coworking-spaces-coworkers-want-165>

Choosing a co-working space



Are there any workshops or social events?

The more you can get out of your co-working experience, the better. Some co-working spaces host networking events and professional development workshops to help tenants get in touch with like-minded entrepreneurs and even investors.

Louize Clarke is the co-founder of [Grow@Greenpark](#) and highlights the importance of offering extra services to tenants; *“Being located in the Thames Valley we are very tech focused and we hold specialist workshops and business drop in sessions to support the businesses here. We really believe in educating small businesses”*

As well as the people you are working alongside, workshops and social events can be hugely beneficial for educating you on areas of business that you may not be familiar with.

Can you look around first?

Many co-working spaces give tenants the option to rent space on a daily, weekly, monthly or yearly basis. Whilst this is a great advantage over the traditional office lease, you should make sure that you understand all of the benefits you receive with your co-working membership.

“You should consider the terms and conditions of the space. How much does it cost? How long is the minimum contract length? Do you need more or less security? Can you add desk spaces if you grow? It’s boring, but important.” continues Adam.

You should ask if you can look around the space ahead of signing any contracts and many co-working spaces offer free trials. Use this time to talk to existing tenants and to decipher where your business would fit within the workspace.

By their nature, co-working spaces are open plan and this generally means that you will be able to hear all of the conversations going on around you. For many people it can be hard to get long stretches of creative and undisturbed work in a shared environment. When you are looking around, you should take time to consider if a co-working space would allow you to be productive and enable you to conduct your day to day business.

Summary

Thinking about co-working?

If you're thinking about co-working, there are a number of useful apps and websites which can help you find desk spaces throughout the UK. Listed below are some of the top co-working search and information links:

Finding co-working spaces	More info on co-working
Finding co-working spaces throughout the UK at DesksNear.Me	The Co-working Google Group is full of co-work based discussions from across the UK
The Business Centre Association has a UK based co-working space search engine	Jelly co-working organises hundreds of group meetings for co-workers across the UK – known as 'Jelly Groups'
Search for desk space across the globe with ShareDesk	DeskMag is a co-working magazine, full of co-working blogs, information and location suggestions
Co-working and desk space search engine and guides from OfficeGenie	The London Enterprise Panel has a co-working map of office spaces throughout the capital
Find meeting rooms, desk space or private offices to rent on MetroDesk	Wikipedia has an entire co-working section and features links to hubs across the world

Thank you to all our contributors:

We would like to thank all of our contributors for providing us with their knowledge and comments:



Philip Dodson is the founder of [@WorkHubs](#) and a mentor for co-working operations. He also runs the International Collaboration Day, a global event promoting co-working and collaboration.



Sara Turnbull is the Chief Executive of [Bootstrap Company](#), a social enterprise providing managed workshops and co-working environments for start-ups and freelancers. She also co-chairs the London Enterprise Panels Workspace Providers Group and has recently spoken in Milan at the Co-working Europe Conference.



James Abbott-Donnelly is the Director of [Duke Studios](#) in Leeds. This is an innovative co-working space providing a work community and services for members of the creative industries including designers, writers and architects.



Adam Richards is the Project Manager of [Camden Collective](#) in London offering award winning co-working spaces and paid-for office spaces to businesses and individuals working within the creative industries.



Tom Lewis is the hub operator of [The Guild](#) in Bath, the city's main co-working space for creative and tech based companies. The hub accommodates a community of 150 businesses and offers a flexible and vibrant space to meet and work.



Louise Clarke is the Co-Founder of [Grow@Greenpark](#) in the Thames Valley specialising in providing desk space, industry experts and mentoring for businesses within the tech and digital industry.



Lawrence Tilley is the Director of [Design for Digital Ltd](#), specialising in creating websites and managing online presence for SME's in the UK.



Ian Pettigrew is the Director of [Kingfisher Coaching](#), providing leadership development programmes, team development and coaching.



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