



Coworking a 'happy medium' between traditional office and home

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Workplace One is one of 20 establishments in Toronto that offer fully furnished private offices or private desks in open-concept spaces. FACEBOOK/Workplace One

When Matthew Dobbie worked from home as a lawyer, often asking his neighbours or the condo's security guard to act as witnesses, he found it bothered some clients that they were meeting in his living room.

"It was awkward," he said. "I probably lost some clients because the setting didn't seem overly professional."

So, when his sister heard about a company that offered coworking spaces for rent, Dobbie looked it up. Soon after he joined **Workplace One** (<http://workplaceone.com/>).

The five-storey building, located in downtown Toronto, is one of 20 establishments that offer fully furnished private offices or private desks in open-concept spaces, with shared access to printing services, conference rooms, kitchens and other common social areas included in the rent.

"I get all that at a lower cost than if I were just renting an office on my own," the 33-year-old lawyer said. "It presents a better front. And it's a nice bonus that I have people to talk to."

In a fast-changing economy, coworking is a shared working environment that meets the needs of freelancers, start-ups, work-at-home professionals, independent contractors, or mobile workers.

According to the Global Coworking Census, conducted last February by **Deskwanted.com** (<http://deskwanted.wordpress.com/>) — a Berlin-based online portal for finding shared workspaces — the number of coworking spaces worldwide in 2013 had reached 2,498. Europe topped the list with 1,160. Canada had 80. By July, the global count had reached 3,000.

Online coworking magazine Deskmag says the first official coworking space opened in San Francisco in 2005.

Ashley Proctor, 32, manager of Toronto coworking space Foundry, thinks coworking is a “happy medium” between the traditional office and the isolation of home.

“You get the best of both worlds — the comforts of home without the distractions of home,” she said. “That’s the beautiful part.”

One of the founding members of CoworkingToronto, a collective established to raise the profile of coworking by working together, said community is the most important aspect of shared workplaces.

“Coworking is not about desk rentals or venue rentals but rather the connections people make with other members and guests in the space,” said Rachel Young.

Gil Martinez is a freelance graphic designer who got lonely and easily distracted working from home. In 2011, he became a tenant at Toronto’s first coworking space, the **Centre for Social Innovation** (<http://socialinnovation.ca/>) (CSI) in Chinatown, allowing him to get his social fix, and work done.

“Since everyone is there to work on their own stuff, office politics are not a problem,” says the 40-year-old. “No one is interested in taking your job, and ... everyone is there to network and make friends.”

Some tenants even found love. Edward Nason, 36, and Saara Siddiqi, 35, met at CSI in 2008.

On his first day, Nason introduced himself to all the tenants via an email sent from his “hot desk,” CSI’s name for a temporary desk with unassigned seating. Siddiqi was the only person to respond.

“I think it’s just because I sent a picture around,” he joked.

Three years later, they got married and threw their wedding reception at CSI.

Dobbie, the lawyer, has been at Workplace One for just three months, but he has already picked up some business from other tenants in the building and plans to extend his six-month contract.

Private offices there range from \$525 to \$2,000 per month. Coworking on the ground floor costs \$225. These two options can also be rented by the day.

By comparison, gross rent for office space in the downtown area ranges from \$35 to \$60 per square foot.

Workplace One has about 300 members across three locations totalling 75,000 square feet. A new location on King Street West is due to open in May.

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