

Collaborate, Create, Co-work

Xbox 360. La-Z-Boy sofas. Air hockey. These amenities might sound like they belong in a frat house — but more and more business travelers are finding such perks (plus others, like massage therapy, acupuncture and communal bikes) at co-working spots across the country. While the practice of co-working — when individuals rent space in an office and work alongside others — is not brand new, the latest offerings are more stylish, technologically advanced and amenity-laden than ever before. Here’s a look at a few of the best:



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BY DAKOTA KIM —

SANDBOX SUITES SAN FRANCISCO

Inspired by his “shoulder to shoulder” days of working at a trading desk — and subsequent ease of idea-sharing — Roman Gelfer founded Sandbox Suites in 2007. It offers various forms of workspaces, including open desks, rotating drafting tables, 1950s coffee bar “thinking” booths (complete with magazines and espresso), private workstations and team offices for up to 6 people.

You’re most likely to see startup CEOs and developers filling the Turnstone desks and mingling at the various Sandbox-hosted social events. It runs regular group bike rides and lunches, “bootstrappers” breakfasts for entrepreneurs looking to solve one another’s problems and workshops on capitalizing startups. “I’ve met friends and col laborators at the samovar tea parties,” says Anu Nigam, owner of Buzzbox.com, a mobile news app. “Those social things make a big difference.”

There are currently three locations, two in San Francisco and one in Berkeley; members can move freely between the three locations. Multiple locations; 415-659-8197; www.sandboxsuites.com

COST: \$295 (desk) to \$595 (single, private furnished office) and up to \$2,000 (private furnished offices for up to 6 people)

SIZE: 6,000 sq. ft. (SOMA); 5,000 sq. ft. (Union Square); 3,600 sq. ft. (Berkeley)

TOTAL WORKSPACES: 50 (SOMA); 50 (Union Square); 30 (Berkeley)

INTERNET SPEED: 50 mbps download, 10 mbps upload

BEST AMENITIES: 1950s-style café, showers, innovative worktables like the Turnstone Campfire Paper Table, a rotating tabletop made of a stack of papers for scratching down notes

THE COOP CHICAGO

This new co-working loft is located in the gallery and boutique-filled River North neighborhood. In a city with a fast-rising technology sector, it attracts mostly designers and web developers; even founder Sam Rosen runs his web design and development business, One Design Company, out of the space. Hot startups like Groupon,

Pogged and VSA Partners are nearby, offering exciting collaboration opportunities. “We’ve had product developers, programmers, lawyers, microfinancers, even a guy getting his doctorate in Spanish history,” says Rosen.

The COOP — which turns into a local artist gallery on Thursdays every six weeks — hosts regular family meals, events and benefits, but perhaps its most loved amenity is Eli, an affectionate golden doodle, who’s been known to improve productivity and encourage well-needed breaks. The COOP also allows members of other co-working spaces to use desk space free of charge for the first few days if their home space participates in the Coworking Visa program. 230 W Superior, 2F; 312-212-0861; www.coworkchicago.com

COST: \$20/day to \$300/month (or 20 visits)

SIZE: 5,000 sq. ft.

TOTAL WORKSPACES: 30-40 (but can fit up to 60 people)

INTERNET SPEED: 50 mbps download, 10 mbps upload

BEST AMENITY: The office dog, a golden doodle named Eli.

BLANKSPACES LOS ANGELES

The flexible, spacious, skylight-filled design is the highlight at Blankspaces, the brainchild of architect Jerome Chang. Open desks can be folded up to reveal an event space for 100 seated guests or 200 standing, the high-end chairs are ergonomic, and the walls are punctuated with three shades of blue fabric and shelving (to boost creativity).

“Every time I bring in a candidate or a client, they’re always impressed,” says member Dylan Campbell, a recruiter. “It feels like you’re at a cool startup.”

The first Blankspaces opened in 2008 in LA’s Miracle Mile area. Nestled between Beverly Hills and Hollywood — and located a stone’s throw from E! Entertainment, Style Network and *Variety* magazine — it unsurprisingly attracts a community of those in the fields of multimedia and entertainment. (A second, larger Santa

Monica location opened in June.) Social media events feature prominently in Blankspaces’ agenda, with famous bloggers giving talks on starting successful blogs, acquiring advertising, generating revenue and hiring staff. Multiple locations; 323-330-9505; www.blankspaces.com

COST: \$15 (for 5 off-peak work bar hours) to \$150 (for 15 peak office hours); \$99 per month

SIZE: 5,000 sq. ft. (Miracle Mile); 7,500 sq. ft. (Santa Monica)

TOTAL WORKSPACES: 4 offices and 28 desks (Miracle Mile); 20+ offices and 60+ desks (Santa Monica)

INTERNET SPEED: 21 mbps download, 7 mbps upload (Miracle Mile); 20 mbps download, 10 mbps upload (Santa Monica)

BEST AMENITIES: Convertible space for events, blogging networking events, ergonomic chairs, free parking

WEWORK NEW YORK CITY

Collaboration is key at this new-in-2010 co-working company, with locations in Midtown, SoHo and the Meatpacking District (plus an office in San Francisco and one in LA that’s in the works). “Thirty percent of our members are doing business with each other; the cash is moving from one hand to the other,” says founding partner Adam Neumann.

Another focus? Sustainability. With recycled furniture, power from renewable sources, energy-efficient lighting, carbon offsets, low-VOC paints, fair-trade organic coffee and environmental charity donations for every member, WeWork is as committed to environmentalism as it is to helping its members succeed.

But there's still room for fun and games. Air hockey and ping pong, nap and meditation rooms, a film screening room, a recording studio, a kitchenette on every floor and lounges all contribute to the social atmosphere.

In March, the company launched WeWork Labs, a startup space at the SoHo location for entrepreneurs to collaborate and brainstorm. Neumann hopes that this will be the beginning of a fertile technology community of the best programmers and designers, as well as a resource for other WeWork members. Multiple locations; 212-961-1300; www.wework.com

COST: \$275/month (lounge) to \$2,850 (private six-person office)

SIZE: 35,000 sq. ft. (SoHo); 42,000 sq. ft. (Midtown); 36,000 sq. ft. (Meatpacking)

TOTAL WORKSPACES: 180 offices (SoHo), 210 offices (Midtown); 160 offices (Meatpacking)

INTERNET SPEED: 75 mbps download, 75 mbps upload

BEST AMENITIES: Bike storage, fair-trade organic coffee, tools available for home use (everything from projectors to drills and ladders)

CAMBRIDGE COWORKING CENTER BOSTON

Those in science or tech-heavy industries will feel right at home at C3. Founded in 2009 within the Cambridge Innovation Center, it offers amenities like an electronics bench and full-wall whiteboards (many with leftover elaborate algorithms) — plus it's located in Kendall Square, in an MIT-owned building. According to a Boston Consulting Group survey, Kendall Square is (per square mile) the most economically and scientifically “innovative” place in the world, measured by new startups, venture-capital investments and research labs.

“MIT is this giant magnet that pulls people from all over the world to do stuff here,” says Founder and CEO Tim Rowe. “[In the Boston area] you'll find more companies that invented a new kind of plastic than companies that developed new mobile phone apps.”

C3, which is open 24/7 and has hosted every one from business students launching fashion websites to people working on green energy, fosters innovation with events like the Venture Café, a networking event for entrepreneurs and VC firms. And the Cambridge Innovation Center and New England Venture Capital Association have just launched CriticalMass, a new co-working space devoted to driving new company creation, with support and participation from various venture capital firms. One Broadway, 14th fl, Cambridge; 617-401-3300; cambridgecoworking.com

COST: \$250 per month

SIZE: 5,000 sq. ft. (expanding this fall)

TOTAL WORKSPACES: There is no cap on occupancy.

INTERNET SPEED: 100 mbps download, 100 mbps upload

BEST AMENITIES: Electronics bench, fleet of bikes, law firm and VC office hours, massage therapists (not to mention unlimited snacks, drinks and fruit)

BEAHIVE BEACON, NY

(33 MILES FROM WHITE PLAINS)

This sunlight-filled, loft-like spot in the artsy town of Beacon was founded in May 2009, and is just as much a community space as it is a place to get work done. Besides the usual networking and solopreneur events, BEAHIVE hosts game nights, film screenings, jazz concerts, fundraiser parties for community organizations and weekly member lunches (not to mention tai chi and acupuncture workshops at its nearby Kingston location). “I view work as holistic,” says founder Scott Tillitt, who is currently looking to open more locations throughout the Hudson Valley, including Poughkeepsie and Hudson. “If you can provide things that inspire people outside of work, it makes them more creative and happier in their work, and that's what I'm really trying to do at BEAHIVE.” 291 Main St (plus a location in nearby Kingston); 845-418-3731; beahivebeacon.com

COST: \$20/day to \$240/resident desk

SIZE: 3,300 sq. ft. (Beacon), 1,600 sq. ft. (Kingston)

TOTAL WORKSPACES: 20-plus, three new private offices (Beacon); 12-plus (Kingston)

INTERNET SPEED: 28 mbps download; 5.25 mbps upload

BEST AMENITIES: Social events like game and film nights, solopreneur sounding boards, charitable parties and fundraisers for local groups, weekly members lunch, Kingston tai chi class, acupuncture events and jazz concerts

INDEPENDENTS HALL PHILADELPHIA

With biomedical, educational and multimedia industries flourishing in Philly, IndyHall attracts all sorts of businesspeople, from designers, game developers and entrepreneurs to scientists, educators and videographers. (Whether they like the Old City space for its 300 square feet of whiteboard or the lounge with an XBox 360 and library is anybody's guess.)

“When one of our workers took his job, his condition was, ‘I want to work from IndyHall three days a week,’” says co-founder Alex Hillman. “I think that there’s an opportunity for companies to view co-working spaces as a reward for productive teams.” Hillman adds that the percentage of companies that subsidize membership fees for those who telecommute is growing. IndyHall, which was founded in 2007, is hoping to change the way we live with a new six-unit residential co-housing development through a partnership with PostGreen, a local sustainable development company. The units will have private living areas and kitchens, while the building will feature a large shared commercial kitchen, dining room and roof deck. 20 N Third St, Unit 201; 267-702-4865; indyhall.org

COST: \$25/day (for non-member) to \$275/month (24/7 access)

SIZE: 4,400 sq. ft.

TOTAL WORKSPACES: 50, including multiple casual work areas

INTERNET SPEED: 26 mbps download, 6 mbps upload

BEST AMENITY: XBox 360 with Guitar Hero

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