



Ben Heslop

Even homeworkers can find their tribe at one of the city's flexible co-working spaces

Ben Heslop is the Programme Manager of Cumbria Business and Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC) which offers free help and support to businesses in pre and post start-up phases through the British Libraries.

Being a business owner can be a lonely place for many reasons, there is no guide book and a lot of people looking towards you as the font of all knowledge... and funds! This could be family relying on you to make it work, employees wanting to feel secure, or customers rightfully seeking the best returns on the promises you have made about your product or service. Sounds terrible right!

While all true, this is a dramatic snapshot, however it is interesting to me, given all these pressures, that so often the people running businesses give little credence to where they actually do all of this "stuff". Now by "stuff" I mean, planning, accounts, meetings, negotiations, ordering, advertising, marketing, reporting, banking and not forgetting eating lunch! If you were going to seek advice from a doctor on your health and they met you at their kitchen table pushing away some half eaten toast and apologising for not having your notes to hand... and then produced said notes with a lovely crayon etched picture

of a dog (or is it a dinosaur?) on the back you would and should be a bit worried about the quality of the diagnosis!

Please don't take this as a rant against home working. I feel one of the great lasting benefits of Covid times for employees and employers was the realisation that the conventional office is not the only way. The "kitchen table" office or the teenage bedroom desk space has long been the reality of many small businesses. I have done it myself to varying levels of success but in truth it has always been a compromise in some form and every time I have sought out a work space away from home, it has without question allowed me a greater freedom, an ability to concentrate, made me more productive and given me a very healthy divide between my work and home life.

So what are the options of breaking the cycle and taking a more professional approach to work spaces when the budget may not be there to hire an office or your idea is still at the pre-start level? Well thankfully I can report they are abundant and varied within our fair city.

Here at the BIPC in Carlisle Library, we have several meeting pods and desk spaces that people can come and use for free. We have a varied clientele, some ad hoc and some regular bookers who use the space for all the tasks I mentioned at the start of this article. With around 25-50 people a month using these spaces the feedback we get is that it allows a different approach to working, a great space to meet clients and most importantly a place to mentally prepare for a "days work".

Another offer in the city is The Guild based in Abbey street Carlisle which provides a really professional and flexible co-working space to all manner of businesses. Their spaces always make me feel so good about literally anything I am doing, be it planning world domination or making a shopping list!

I recently took a tour of their new conference centre which has the design and feel of a high end Swedish hotel twinned with the practicalities and tech to host any event you could imagine, be it in person or a hybrid set up. The great thing about their offer is that, be it a single desk for half a day, or a regular private office or meeting room you can access a level of professionalism and facility on your terms and make it work for you and your business.

Dan Jackson says: "Here at The Guild we really wanted to create a space that made you love where you work, whether that's great surroundings or being surrounded by great people."

And that is another real benefit to co-working spaces. Not only do places like the Guild and the BIPC provide physical space but it can help you link with others on the same journey. The old cliché of business being done around the water cooler is a real and tangible thing. We see many people linking through our shared space, be it with us as advisors or others using the space.

As the testimonials on the Guild's website shows, a lot of people mention being "part of the Guild" and phrases like "inspirational work space", "increased productivity" and "a chance to share" which is testament to the fact that being in a place to work is much more than simply tables and chairs. I can echo that here also and am never happier than when I see, like I can now as I write this, a 1:1 meeting in our pod, a freelancer set up in our booth and three people having a team meeting in our breakout area. The feeling of being part of something and seeing others achieve really does bolster my spirits and remind me I am at work and that work is good!

Want to know more about the guild offer or the BIPC offer then take a look below.

theguildcoworking.co.uk
cumbriabipc.org.uk