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Lifestyle centers may be virtual office of the future

Orlando Business Journal - June 22, 2007 by [Mary Gardner](#)

On your next mid-day trip to your favorite cafe for a latte, look around at your fellow patrons. You will see dozens of people with their laptops conducting business.

This isn't limited to your local coffee shop or cafe -- people are conducting their business like this all over the globe.

As more and more people go wireless, we can literally conduct business from the beach, the mountains or our favorite vacation destination. All we really need is our laptop, a phone or wireless connection and a place to sit. As an entrepreneur who sometimes works from home, I can attest to the notion that where we work is a very important factor in how productive our day is.

If so many of us are working virtually, where do we hang our hats? Starbucks certainly isn't the only meeting place in town. Some groups subscribe to www.meetup.com where groups share ideas and network at locations arranged by a meet-up leader. Is this the professional workplace of the future?

Today, lifestyle centers are going up around the country faster than shopping malls. I see in the not-so-distant-future that lifestyle centers -- which are a mix of retail and leisure activities -- will be part of train stations and airports. Once these spaces are set up, the virtual worker will demand other services and a whole new commerce will be invented.

Picture this: you walk into the entrance of a lifestyle center and find a massive electronic billboard, just like in a European train station, posting interest groups. Instead of participating in virtual groups, professionals will be sitting at one of the hundreds of numbered tables throughout the center. At these lifestyle centers, we will have everything we need in one location. Not only will there be movie theaters, game rooms, spas, child care and workout facilities, but every business service imaginable -- taxes, financial planning, mediation or coaching services and professional organizers -- will be available at our actual or virtual fingertips.

In addition, lifestyle centers will offer every type of personal service available, right there at the "work pod." The masseuse will arrive at 1 p.m., while your dry cleaning, take-out food and routing carts will deliver daily vitamins. Group conversations will be recorded live on the Web for others to join virtually. People will be able to text ahead from home to determine which online conversations would be beneficial. Tables can be rented to take individual appointments locally, or even from around the globe in a conference center equipped with video conferencing capabilities. These lifestyle centers will be open for business 24/7, and security will be the highest priority.

Now that so much commerce is conducted online, shopping malls may have to explore this niche to stay in the game. Perhaps companies will rent tables where virtual employees will meet daily, or groups with similar interests will have set groupings of tables.

Imagine the possibilities for people to work together in this kind of creative, thriving, atmosphere of convenience and opportunity. The inevitable loneliness that comes with a home office would go away. Work life balance would improve. The hassles associated with errands and appointment setting would decrease and time and fuel would be saved!

A new home for workers is coming just around the virtual corner.

Mary Gardner is president of Lifestyles Communications Inc., which is dedicated to helping individuals understand and succeed in the new virtual, Internet and global marketplace. Contact her at Mary@lifestylescomm.com

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