

The atmosphere at 91Springboard rubs off on Bhargava's employees, too. She says it was difficult to get people to join up when she worked out of a garage. "This is lovely. Their unwind sessions on Fridays are a big hit among my young staff members," says Bhargava.

Shortcut to the Network

Unwind sessions, with different organizations participating, can be great for networking. Satish Khanna, a former pharma honcho turned serial entrepreneur and now a mentor for start-ups, says: "Networking is key to any successful business."

Khanna himself worked out of Regus, a multinational coworking place with a five-star feel. "Every Monday I would set aside time to meet [executives of] two other companies that worked out of the same centre. This helped me immensely in making new contacts and helping some of them find new connections that led to new business."

Whilst Regus is more in the mould of the business centres of yore – catering to the suits of India Inc – at the start-up coworking spaces, the opportunities for networking are palpably informal. 91Springboard has Friday meet-ups over beer, and Bombay Connect holds a weekly chat session. Also, seating at Bombay Connect is organized in a manner that brings users face to face, virtually forcing them to get to know each other.

Mohit Bhatnagar, managing director of Sequoia Capital, a venture capital firm, says coworking hubs can be a great helping hand and also a good place to find co-founders. "In the early days being in a young start-up can be a tough and lonely existence. Imagine being resource constrained all the time, being told 'no' more often than not by potential customers," he points out. He adds that since the community of entrepreneurs and folks in the broader start-up ecosystem tend to congregate at these places, opportunities can come knocking more often than if you were working out of, say, your apartment. "I have seen folks discover their business partners at places like 91Springboard," says Bhatnagar.

Take, for example, Rajnish Kohli, a seasoned corporate executive who is setting up office at 91Springboard after just having quit his job to use his experience, ideas and funds to seed start-ups. "It is a place where I can meet young wannabe entrepreneurs easily," he says. He has seed-funded Prashanth Kumar Tondapu's Jobswan.in, a start-up that is trying to make reference hiring easier by helping people scan their social network. Used to spacious corner



Rajnish Kohli, 53
mentor and investor

COWORKS OUT OF
91Springboard, Gurgaon

WHAT HE DOES

Backing Jobswan.in, a start-up seeded by Prashanth Tondapu (L)

WHY COWORK Great place to find smart young talent and to operate on a shoestring budget

"I like the kind of talent and energy this place has"



Anand Vemuri
founder, 91Springboard

ACCOMMODATES
170 people, 50 start-ups

USP Think of a college dorm with its carefree work environment clubbed with the start-up ecosystem like mentoring from experts

rooms and plush offices, Kohli admits it will take him time to get used to such open offices with little privacy.

Another man who hopes to help fund his fellow start-ups some day is Satish Kataria, 37, founder of Catapoolt, a crowdfunding venture working out of The Playce in Mumbai. This is Kataria's second venture and, while the first time he did it from a more conventional office, once he took a look at The Playce the concept floored him.

Find a Need, Meet a Need

Most coworking hubs are informal and you may spot young workers in shorts and flip flops or even barefoot and sitting cross-legged on their chairs. These places thrive on a sharp focus on what is important, ignoring the rest. So everything is bare-bone and utilitarian. Want to book the meeting room? Just write on the white board and you are done. No big administrative machinery to go through. The reception area doubles up as an unwind zone, with perhaps a carrom board thrown in. The work tables convert into lunch tables during lunch hour and with ease turn into a working zone after that. Nobody bothers about or is surprised to see a child fooling around in the common area.

A proof of the concept arriving is surely that IT industry body Nasscom has set up Startup Warehouse in Bangalore and is planning another one in Kolkata. Spread over 10,000 square feet, Startup Warehouse has 68 seats and houses 28 start-ups. At ₹3,500 a month and on the old airport road, getting a seat is difficult. "We take start-ups that are past the idea stage," says senior manager Ashok Madaravally, who also heads Nasscom's "10,000 Startup" initiative.

Riyaz Amlani, a serial F&B entrepreneur who created Social Offline, lets on that he had to choose 50 people out of the 350 applications he got when he opened up for start-ups with a fee of ₹5,000 a month that is redeemable for food and drinks. "Think of it like the business clubs in five-star hotels like the Belvedere. Except that Social Offline is targeting younger and trendier workers," says Amlani. Social Offline was a regular café that had around 30% seats lying unutilized during the day. Amlani hit upon the idea as he tried to monetize this. And in the evening the hub turns into a regular bar – hip

Aakriti Bhargava, 31
founder, Boringbrands.com

COWORKS OUT OF
91Springboard, Gurgaon

WHAT SHE DOES

Online marketing for start-ups

WHY COWORK Takes care of administrative hassles

"With a good office and decent infrastructure, attracting talent has become easier"



ASHWANI NAGPAL

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