

Effortless English

Neo: adj. new

Bedouins: n. an Arabic
nomadic tribe

breed: n. kind

flourishing: v. growing and
succeeding

roaming: v. moving around

nomadic: adj. always moving,
frequently moving

wandered: v. travelled, roamed
come to be known as: v. started
to be called

armed with: v. carrying, hav-
ing

access: n. ability to get & use

muffins: n. kind of cupcake

the world at large: n. the rest
of the world

laying off: v. firing

contributing to: adding to
insecurity: n. safety, stability

on the cheap: adv. cheaply

Palo Alto: n. a town in Silicon
Valley

declares: v. says

innovation: n. creativity

mobile: adj. able to move

infrastructure: n. public goods
and services (ie. roads, phones.)

emerged: v. come out

Kinkos: n. a copy & print shop

Wi-Fi: wireless internet

laptops: n. portable computers

revenge: n. hurting or defeat-
ing someone after they hurt you

the means of production: n.
the tools for making something

hop: v. jump

Neo-Bedouins

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A new breed of worker, fueled by caffeine and using the tools of modern technology, is flourishing in the coffeehouses of San Francisco. Roaming from cafe to cafe and borrowing a name from the nomadic Arabs who wandered freely in the desert, they've come to be known as "bedouins."

San Francisco's modern-day bedouins are typically armed with laptops and cell phones, paying for their office space and Internet access by buying coffee and muffins.

San Francisco's bedouins see themselves changing the nature of the workplace, if not the world at large. They see large companies like General Motors laying off workers, contributing to insecurity. And at the same time, they see the Internet providing the tools to start companies on the cheap. In the Bedouin lifestyle, they are free to make their own rules.

"The San Francisco coffeehouse is the new Palo Alto garage," declares Kevin Burton, 30, who runs his Internet startup "Tailrank" without renting offices. "It's where all the innovation is happening."

The move toward mobile self employment is also part of what author Daniel Pink identified when he wrote "Free Agent Nation" in 2001.

"A whole infrastructure has emerged to help people work in this way," Pink said. "Part of it includes places like Kinkos, Office Depot and Staples." It also includes places like Starbucks and independent coffee shops, where Wi-Fi -- wireless Internet access for laptops and other devices -- is available.

"The infrastructure makes it possible for people to work where they want, when they want, how they want," said Pink.

Pink calls it "Karl Marx's revenge, where individuals own the means of production. And they can take the means of production and hop from coffee shop to coffee shop."

Web worker: n. person who works with the internet
 Wild West: n. an area that is very free and open
 Ritual Roasters: n. name of a coffee shop in SF
 epicenter: n. the center or headquarters of something
 movement: n. a trend in society
 packed: v. filled, crammed
 buzzed: v. went by (or through) quickly
 Segway Scooter: n. a one person "pedestrian" scooter
 hip: adj. cool
 locked up in: v. trapped in
 Venerable: adj. very old
 firm: n. company
 clientele: n. group of customers
 ensured: v. guaranteed
 marine: adj. related to the sea or ocean
 Parisian: adj. related to or from Paris (France)
 North Beach: n. a neighborhood in San Francisco
 hangouts: n. place where people gather, meet, and chat
 joined the ranks: v. joined the group
 It would figure: idiom. it makes sense, its not surprising
 in action: v. being used
 overhead: n. fixed business costs (ex. rent, insurance,...)
 struck out on his own: idiom. started by himself, went out by himself, did something independently

"There is nothing more free than being a Web worker," Om Malik says. "There is no boss. You work for yourself. This is the new Wild West. The individual is more important. That's the American way. It's about doing things your own way. Web workers represent that. ... It's the future, my friend."

Ritual Roasters in San Francisco's Mission District is in many ways the epicenter of the bedouin movement. Ritual, on Valencia Street near 21st Street, is almost always packed with people working on laptops.

Every bedouin seems to have a Ritual story. There's the time someone buzzed through the cafe on a Segway scooter. Rubyred Labs, a hip Web design shop in South Park, had its launch party there. Teams from established Web companies such as Google Inc. and Flickr, a photo sharing site that's now owned by Yahoo, meet there. "You'd never know these guys were millionaires," said Ritual co-owner Jeremy Tooker.

As for why they're there, Sean Kelly said, "I'm visiting with my friends instead of being locked up in a big building in the South Bay."

Using a cafe to run a business is nothing particularly new. Venerable insurance firm Lloyd's of London was actually started in a coffee house, Kennedy points out. According to the Lloyd's of London Web site, "Edward Lloyd opened a coffee house in 1688, encouraging a clientele of ships' captains, merchants and ship owners -- earning him a reputation for trustworthy shipping news. This ensured that Lloyd's coffee house became recognized as the place for obtaining marine insurance."

Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote some of their best work in Parisian cafes. And in San Francisco, writers and poets of the Beat generation, such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, wrote in the cafes of North Beach.

Caffe Trieste was among the most popular North Beach hangouts. "To have a cappuccino, you come to North Beach, to Caffe Trieste," says Giovanni "Papa Gianni" Giotta, the founder.

Now Caffe Trieste has joined the ranks of Wi-Fi cafes. It would figure that the one laptop in action on a recent afternoon belonged to an art dealer. "A cappuccino for overhead isn't bad," said David Salow, 33. He struck out on his own three months ago, and has yet to open a gallery. "Sixty to 70 percent of what I do can be done with the standard tools available to everyone -- a phone, a computer and a laptop connection."

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