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## There's More to Count Than Beans

*Charlie Grantham and Jim Ware*

This is the final article in a six-part series on Business Community Centers that began in [the September 2009 issue](#) of this newsletter.

To refresh your thinking, Business Community Centers (BCC's) are shared work environments that are usually located in urban villages, suburban centers, or rural towns. They distinguish themselves from other so-called executive suites or shared workplaces (such as those offered by companies like Regus) in that they typically:

- are much lower in cost;
- are based on a membership model that includes drop-in access and “by the hour” services like conference rooms and administrative support;
- pay significant attention to social connectivity and community-building activities in addition to high-bandwidth technical network access;
- offer business and economic development assistance to members; and
- provide a highly compelling work experience

Owners and operators of Business Community Centers ***make more money from the margin on services other than space rental***, in contrast with a traditional real estate transaction based almost entirely on providing space over a specified period of time (via a lease or rental agreement).

BCC services range from conference rooms, video links to virtual assistants, and professional services like accounting, legal advice, graphics design, health care, and discounts on planes, trains, and hotels. The secret to business success in this arena is matching the range of services offered to the demands of the diversity of members for a particular BCC. We are fond of saying “One size misfits all.”. And that is especially true here. There isn't a “typical” BCC client, or member, as we prefer to call them.

The best analogy we can think of is a health club. You pay a small monthly fee to have access on some minimal basis to a limited set of services, say treadmills, weight room, and showers. Anything else—like personal trainers, racquetball courts, or specialized classes—is an extra charge. And trust us, that's where the bucks are made in that business.

With a BCC, you make money, in our view, not from simply providing a place for a butt, but (like that alliteration?) by giving people access to the tools and services they need to do their work faster, easier, and with less hassle. It's as simple, and as complicated, as that.

However, the secret sauce that we aren't giving away is knowing what the market segments are in each locale—and how they change quickly over time. Also one of your primary design principles must be developing an agile physical and technical work

environment; you want to be able to set up (and break down) for special meetings or other needs on a moment's notice.

Lastly (and we believe in this point very strongly) is that BCC's must be places that enable people to connect socially (and professionally). That takes conscious effort and sufficient resources to actually manage the community part of the equation. A BCC must be a place where everyone knows your name, and everyone can name the place.

### **An Afterword**

In the past we've typically rattled on for four pages or so in our feature articles, filling in a lot of the details behind our thinking. We didn't just expound on the importance of lower cost, or what makes a compelling work experience.

From now on, we're reserving that level of design guidance for members of our Private Client Network, major consulting engagements, proprietary research projects, and local partners in the communities where we live and work. If you are seriously interested in exploring our perspectives on how to make money in a BCC operation (or other ideas we have previously written about) please [contact us directly](#) to arrange a focused conversation.

[Please send your comments directly to us.](#) We look forward to learning from you.

### **About the Work Design Collaborative and *Future of Work Agenda***

*Future of Work* is a global network of resources – practitioners, thought leaders, researchers, and senior consultants – who are committed to building and implementing physical, social, and technology-based work environments that are cost-effective, socially and environmentally responsible, and personally satisfying.

We are focused on defining the future of work and helping our members and clients achieve new levels of workforce and workplace productivity. *Future of Work* produces and distributes management tools, surveys, benchmark databases, white papers and technical reports, conferences and workshops, newsletters, books and articles, and public presentations on the changing nature of work. The Work Design Collaborative, LLC, provides leadership and infrastructure services for the *Future of Work* community.

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