

**As we begin to understand how important human connection is to our well-being and creative process**, initiatives to create spaces where like-minded people come together to form communities are popping up everywhere.

At the [Montreal Art Centre](#), artists set up their easels in an open room, the perimeters of their space defined by a thick yellow outline on the floor. There are no walls – all thirty-five artists have access to the light that pours in the windows. [Martin Dansky](#) says it's like osmosis how other artists' work has had an effect on his style, and his on theirs. He likes how being part of the centre has meant access to other arts communities in the city and abroad. [Ron Jones](#) appreciates the tips and critiques he gets. "I learn so much," he says, "especially from those who have lived in other cultures, seeing how it has influenced their style."

[Allan Diamond](#), founder of the centre, and an artist himself, has leased space to artists since 2011 in the large building he renovated in Montreal's up-and-coming Griffintown. "It was a small community when we began," says Diamond, "and that got us off to a good start." But building a community has taken time.

[Mitch Joel](#), marketer and author of *Control, Alt, Delete*, says that how we work best is still evolving. The workplace is [moving in new directions](#) that digital connections allow. If we agree that getting together face-to-face adds an integral piece to the puzzle of learning and innovation, can we use digital tools to speed up the time it takes to form a community?

Joel has been building an online community since 2003. On his site, he pulls together the ideas of many, offering regular blog posts, podcasts, a twitter feed. But a lot of his time also goes to attending "un-conferences" all over North America where he meets members of the community. "[A truly successful conference](#)," he says, is one that leverages the many online platforms to create connections before and after the event."

There are [lots of co-working spaces](#) for rent out there. Websites depict open office spaces filled with sleek furniture and young professionals. But renting the perfect space – even in the presence of creative people – does not guarantee the important step of getting to know and learn from each other.

Steve Bautech has been blogging for [Creative Density](#), a co-working space in Denver formed by an existing community, since 2011. The community decided together to put people first: [Members don't rent, they join](#). The community's website provides a tool to make sure that the people who get together are already talking.

Digital tools can be used to complement and strengthen our communities on the ground. The more we share, the more we learn, the more innovative we become. Digital expands our reach.

---

[E-180 / Labs](#) 'mission is to transform events, spaces and organisations into peer-learning hubs,