

SoHo's so groovy,

THE freedom of working from home might sound fabulous, but many self-employed professionals say it is not all it's cracked up to be.

Domestic duties often creep into work time. There may be difficulties with meeting clients at the office and many people find the lack of contact with other workers isolating.

Sue-Ann Stanford, a project manager in vocational education and training, worked from home for only six months before a friend convinced her to move out and share an office.

"Because I am also a mother of young children and was home a lot, I really needed to get out," said Ms Stanford. "I was often doing housework during work time

In a backlash to the isolation of working from home, more professionals are hiring their own city offices which can come with a desk, chairs and even a secretary for \$320 a week. **Belinda Green reports.**

and now I am much more productive."

She also enjoys leaving her work at the office.

"It's fantastic having a space of my own," she said. "At home the office space was the children's too. [My new office] is a small space, but it is completely mine."

Ms Stanford shares the office space with three others — writer Jenny White, filmmaker Zoe Harvey and fa-

shion designer/cafe owner Anke Timm.

"It is good to share with people. You can share information readily and we give each other moral support," said Ms Stanford.

The three rent space in Foveaux Studios, an old warehouse conversion in Surry Hills.

"It's groovy. It's got beautiful dark old floorboards, enormous windows with lots of light and like-minded people."

Robert Deans, managing director of Deans Property, the leasing agents for Foveaux Studios, Langley Terraces in East Sydney and the upcoming Aladdin Studios in Marrickville said: "There is a huge demand for cheap funky space and a creative environment."

"There is a strong growth in professionals going into small business — particularly with the IT revolution — and in the demand for community style environments. There is also the benefit of shared facilities such as photocopiers and fax machines."

Costs vary depending on the building and location, but range from about \$200 to \$600 a week for between 40 and 150sqm.

According to Craig Plumb of Jones Lang LaSalle, office vacancy rates in Sydney are at a 10-year low.

Vacancy rates in the CBD are 4.2pc, North Sydney 3.3pc, Chatswood 3.2pc and Parramatta 10pc.



IAN MCCANN: "I needed a central location for interviews."

Photo: SIMON ALEKNA

According to Andy Collins, a leasing executive at Jones Lang LaSalle, those wishing to rent smaller spaces in premium buildings in town can expect to pay about \$720 gross (including outgoings such as building maintenance but not electricity) per square metre per annum — or about \$550 a week for 40sqm.

Tim Robinson, also of Jones Lang LaSalle, said one can expect to pay about \$230 to \$250 per sqm per annum in the city fringe (\$185 per week for 40 sqm for a B-grade building).

Space in a premium building in Bondi Junction is more likely to cost about \$330 to \$350sqm per annum (\$261 per week gross for 40sqm). Costs decrease as you move further out, or into C-grade buildings. Make sure you check exactly what your rent covers — and what it doesn't.

Along with the surge in interest for "funky" spaces

— often from graphic designers, architects and IT professionals — there is an increasing demand for serviced offices. The benefits here extend to having a receptionist to answer the phone, use of meeting rooms and, in some cases, even fitness centres.

Ian McCann has run his personnel recruitment company, Insurance Appointments, from a serviced office in the city for 15 years.

"I needed a central location as people come to interviews, so working from home is no go," he said.

His monthly rental of \$1,350 includes a small fully-furnished room with a desk, two visitors chairs, filing cabinet and phone lines. "Someone answers the phone in my business name and redirects the calls," he says. "I used to answer my own calls, but not any more."

Another growth area is the

office you have when your not having an office. Jennifer Nott, runs the virtual office facility, Office Assist.

"You can work from home and give the impression that you work in the city even if you don't have an office, or if you move around a lot," she said.

"Someone will answer the phone and put calls through to you, and you can use a meeting room when needed."

The cost ranges from \$120 per week for a phone answering service and business address to a maximum of \$220 per week.

According to Nott, with the increased use of internet and e-mail facilities, there has been huge growth in the number of people working from home. So, it seems, there is growth in self-employed people moving in both directions — to and from the home office. As Nott suggests, perhaps the best option "depends on your personality".

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