# Extension life in a sharing world

## Build the Power of Collaborative Planning by Minimizing the Headaches of Technical Glitches

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I do my best work collaboratively. Having my ideas vetted by others, exploring areas I had not considered… it all adds up to some powerful work.

Given the 24/7 nature of on-line communications, it is easy to collaborate with people beyond my regular day-to-day circle of colleagues. Indeed, it can add rich, diverse opinions when the collaborative group crosses a larger area. There's a lot to be said for extending your thinking regionally, provincially or even broader. I don't even have to schedule travelling time and face-to-face meetings into my busy life – the collaborative group simply meets virtually. We share document revisions back and forth, and schedule occasional chat room or white board sessions, meeting in cyberspace.

Collaborative work in a virtual environment is not reserved for just "distance" groups. I often use this planning, writing and editing approach even with the people immediately around me. Seeing several possible versions or ideas spread out across my monitor helps me to see the big picture, to pick up on diverging strands and to synthesize the ideas into a coherent whole. (I also do my best writing and editing at 2 am… and NO ONE wants to meet with me at that time!)

Basic e-mail with its flat text can start the process and build nebulous ideas into something worth pursuing. Eventually however, the project requires growth into a true, print-formatted layout with integrated images.

If there is ONE thing co-operative writing has taught me, it is that all document sharing discussions eventually swing round to the nitty-gritty of format issues. So long before the creative juices start flowing, why not spend a minute or two and talk about some basics:

 Which writing tool(s) will the group use?

 Can everyone open standard format extensions? [document**.doc** document**.wpd** document**.cwk** document**.txt** document**.rtf**]

 Which image formats can people view? [image**.psd** image**.bmp** image**.tiff** image**.jpg** image**.gif** image**.png** image**.drw**]

I already know that we will have great ideas to share as a group, and I eagerly look forward to building a body of work together, but the compatibility of the technology can interfere:

 Is your board using Corel WordPerfect, Microsoft Word or Claris/AppleWorks?

 Which font sets do we have in common?

 Are you a Mac user, a Windows user, a Linux user?

 Which image-editing suite shall we use together?

When sharing information in document form, the look and layout matter and become a key part of the planning process. Have you ever "opened" a document only to see all the table columns jumbled and hopelessly mixed? Or seen just the text and none of the pictures?

If the critical thinking and shared planning