

New Voices

Emerging Trends in Office Space Requirements and Attracting Talent

Office space planning and layout are important topics in the commercial real estate industry directly affecting employees who work in a traditional office. Employees, especially young professionals, want to enjoy a comfortable and flexible working environment since they are likely to spend 40-plus hours a week working in that space.

For example, improved visual enhancements that remove conventional concrete walls and replace them with glass are being utilized. This way all employees, not just senior level management, can feel like they have a window office.

Another reason that office space trends are significant is the major effect it has on the profit margins in commercial real estate. If organizations are adjusting their office space requirements, especially if they are moving to smaller, better organized offices and a more mobile workforce, it will clearly impact the demand for office space.

Julie Benezet, managing director, Urban Partners, and former director of global real estate at Amazon.com, has carefully observed the office space needs of American companies for years and sees a continuation of smaller, more efficient office configurations. She believes that change is here to stay. "Companies are providing less space for their employees regardless of name and rank. Connectivity and communication are vital in a productive work environment, and this has nothing to do with plush carpet and large offices. If the office space is designed so that it's hard to get to people, it can have a serious negative impact," says Benezet. However, she is quick to point out that organizations aren't all jumping onto the "flex office" band wagon too quickly. Companies are realizing that different employees have different needs, and while the needs for one department might be more private office spaces with walls and doors, another department might thrive on close communication and be organized in a "teaming area," with almost no traditional office components to it.



Photo courtesy of Maguire Photography

Amending traditional office space layouts is imperative to allow innovation and fresh ideas to emerge. This office space fuses open ceilings with translucent hallways and live plants to create a stimulating office atmosphere.



Photo courtesy of Wakefield Beasley & Associates

A conference room with glass walls and glass doors creates an open and inviting office environment.

The driving force behind office space design changes are the young professionals in the market. "Flexibility is non-negotiable. Younger workers spearheaded this transformation and now it's the norm. Generations X and Y are trying to accomplish so much in their professional and personal lives and in order to do it all, they have to handle some personal matters while at work and tackle some work projects while at home. Organizations that don't embrace these flexibility requirements of younger workers, and adjust their office space accordingly, will suffer greatly," comments Benezet.

An additional element in the reduction of office space that was championed by younger employees is the mobile workforce. E-mail, text messaging, telecommunicating and virtual teams are communication devices that young professionals are very familiar and comfortable with, all of which have a ripple effect on office design.

Although office space and communication methods are changing and improving, Benezet cautions young professionals to maintain solid social skills so they are able to converse easily with a variety of colleagues in person, not just on-line. ■

Photo courtesy of Prakash Patel

Following current office space trends, developers are now incorporating additional glass windows and reducing barrier walls to allow additional sunlight and fresh air to circulate.

