Support Your Business with Workplace Design

For many corporate executives, the view of the workplace typically ranges from an afterthought to an overhead expense. However, many enlightened executives view facilities as a strategic tool that can support and enhance their business goals. Let’s take a moment to look at the many ways in which the work environment can function as a strategic tool.

**Workplace helping to improve productivity.** For many companies, the workplace functions as a tool that supports and enhances employee productivity. The American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) conducted a study that demonstrates when designers pay attention to factors such as comfort, access, privacy and flexibility, the outcome is productivity improvements. For example, GHK designed a national call center for one of our clients, an insurance company. The space plan improved access to one’s co-workers and supervisors, provided ergonomically correct, flexible workstations to accommodate 24/7 operation, and upgraded technology and cabling access to speed data exchange. The result was a significant reduction in the time required to process auto claims and increased customer satisfaction.

**Workplace that supports hiring and retention.** Even in a slowed economy, the search to hire and retain the best and brightest talent continues. The quality of the workplace has been shown to be a factor in employees’ decisions to join and stay with a company. High tech firms are accustomed to including amenities in the workplace, such as game rooms, fitness centers and showers. Additionally, buildings with amenities such as dry cleaning, post office, shoe repair and day care are at a premium in part because they allow employees to manage to details of their personal lives efficiently so they can concentrate on the job. That same insurance company call center is located in a market in which at least five other insurance companies have call centers, making the war for talent very fierce. The company views their facilities as well as their culture as tools they use to woo employees.

**Work environments that support growth and change.** Given that the only constant is change and that the pace of business gets faster every day, committing to a lease can be a difficult decision. Good designers know how to build work environments that maximize flexibility so that growth and change can be accommodated at minimal cost. Furniture manufacturers have brought to market all manner of moveable, foldable, stackable office furnishings that morph almost effortlessly from conference space to work area to presentation room. Without such flexibility costs can rise and the workplace can be more of an albatross than an asset.

Looking at change from a different perspective, some companies have used changes in the work environment to signal and enhance changes in overall corporate philosophy, goals and work styles. Companies that were once populated with perimeter offices for executives and a few desks at the core for administrative staff now feature open workstations throughout to improve access and support teaming. Companies use activity based work settings to provide a variety of mini-environments within a single workspace thus allowing an employee to go from team session to heads-down work to coffee break within the same area.

**Work environment that support and build brand.** Most people with marketing savvy understand the importance of a good brand. Work environments can create impact that surpasses a great brochure or TV spot and works daily to reinforce brand. Think Starbucks, McDonald’s, Disneyland. In addition, marketing areas can be designed into the work environment and become showplaces for the company’s wares. One of our clients, a hospital supply company, has its corporate values emblazoned on a prominent, well-lit wall in its customer waiting area. Thus a primer on the organization and what it stands for begins for each customer before a marketing
person even enters the room. Another has a dedicated marketing area that is redesigned every 18 months to show newer and better tools and technology.

Clearly facilities can function as a strategic tool for a business, fostering and supporting corporate vision, values and goals. Thus the next time you visit a competitor, note how they view their workspace. The next time you meet with an architect or designer make sure it’s someone who understands how to create a workplace that actively supports and promotes your business.