



Wide OPEN Spaces

Today's high-energy work spaces are boundless, flexible and alive with color.

By Francesca Di Meglio

Just as a suit can make the man, so can an office make the business. Today's office design can be summed up in three words: **color**, **flexibility** and **creativity**.

Knowing this, senior executives at marketing firm NOBLE Chicago partnered with architect Powell/Kleinschmidt to create a high-energy workspace that is modern and flexible. While interested in a redesign, NOBLE also wanted to insure practicality regarding the layout and aesthetics. The new, functional office is alive with color—from saturated blue to bright orange.

Today, an open layout that can evolve and change to suit the needs of a young company is a popular office design tactic. Those who are taking this untraditional route say it works—and their employees and clients love it.

At NOBLE, employee work stations—from desks to file cabinets—are on wheels and can easily be moved. There are boards for tacking messages throughout the space



Bartle Bogle Hegarty
office, New York

that encourage brainstorming on the go. “We have ideas all over the place,” says Paul Brusatori, senior vice president.

The employee café is more a coffee bar than a cafeteria, which encourages people to socialize and cultivate ideas, while themed meeting rooms are meant to turn on the lightbulb in employees. The soft-scape room, for example, is round and features an S-shaped couch to stimulate conversation and ideas.

Eliminating cubicles is often the first step in redesigning an office. At many companies, even the CEO is sitting in the communal workspace.

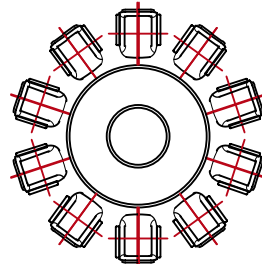
Alpha CEOs across the country, experts say, are doing this because they find it keeps up morale.

Just ask Richard Sheridan, president and CEO of Menlo Innovations in Ann Arbor, Mich. He shares a five-foot-long table with a colleague in a communal open room. “Tear down the walls,” he says. “That’s both a literal and figurative advisement.”

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Menlo Park, N.J., calls his company a “software factory.” Having everyone sit out in the open lends itself to impromptu meetings and discussions. The sound of work is constant. “People can feel the energy when they walk into our space,” Sheridan says.

Creating a friendly space is important, as is having a shared purpose that helps forge a sense of unity among colleagues. “People come to work to see people, hear what’s going on, build a community and be part of the community,” says Tom Vecchione, principal at Gensler Architecture Design and Planning Worldwide.

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WANT YOUR HOME OFFICE TO BE COOL? TAKE YOUR CUES FROM THE CORPORATE WORLD.

Nowadays, more people are telecommuting or running entire businesses from home, and it's important to have the right bells and whistles there, too.

BRING IN DA' NOISE. Richard Sheridan, president and CEO of Menlo Innovations in Ann Arbor, Mich., tells the story of an employee who had to work from home one day while waiting for a delivery. So used to the buzzing office and sounds of work, the employee called a colleague via Skype and stayed connected to create the usual background noise. The lesson: Do whatever you need to get into the groove.

CUT DOWN ON CLUTTER. Go to an a supply store (The Container Store, Staples and The Home Depot have departments with these kinds of products) and organize all your stuff. "A place for everything and everything in its place," says Alexander Kjerulf, a consultant on how to make companies happier environments.

LOSE THE BORING SHADES OF GRAY. Go pink if the company represents girly frills or emerald green if it has a more masculine persona. Pick the hues that will get you motivated and ready to come up with brilliant ideas.

LET THE SUN SHINE. Do what you can to bring in natural light. Then, make sure to install lamps and fixtures that provide enough lighting to get your work done without straining your eyes. Consider task lighting near your computer.

Besides creating areas for quick and easy meetings, employers should also use the office space to support brand identity. Vecchione suggests putting a billboard with the company logo in the lobby or some other prominent area. This helps employees better understand the larger concept and goals of the firm, so they can better focus and support the philosophy.

Furniture and style can also make a statement about the company's identity. Sharon May-Zinser, vice president of sales and marketing of St. Louis-based Directions In Design Inc., uses green furniture and supplies. The goods are made of materials and finishes that are recycled or use safe chemicals that will not damage the environment. Going green is an example of one recent trend in corporate design that can send a message to clients and employees.

Smart CEOs bring their employees into discussions about designing the office. Finding out what people need in order to accomplish their tasks is a surefire way to insure they feel important and in the loop.

One thing that is simple, affordable and can give a room a completely different look is painting it. Offices have come out of the

dark ages by trading their gray walls for color. Bright hues are best for creativity, cool pastels promote calmness and earthy shades create warmth.

At Menlo Innovations, the air duct pipes are painted bright orange. Green, yellow and red are among the other popular accent colors offices are using to wake up their workers. Introducing color, surprises and playfulness in office design is a great mantra, says Alexander Kjerulf, self-proclaimed "chief happiness officer" and author of *Happy Hour is 9 to 5*.

"It's easier to be productive, creative and happy at work in a colorful, organic, playful environment than in a gray, linear, boring one for one simple reason: Your brain takes many clues from your surroundings," he says. "If everything you see looks the same, your mind becomes passive."

Just what will offices look like in the future? It looks like the trend is going to be unique workstations that employees design themselves. Everything will be mobile to promote careers and lives on the go. Open spaces will rule the day as long as teams remain the preferred way of doing business. Fun will be a top priority since there are fewer and fewer lines drawn between work and play. ■



Virgin Mobile office,
New Jersey

