



FEATURE



Corporate Office Design Evolves and Changes with the Times

[By Barry Poskanzer, AIA, Principal and Partner at Poskanzer Skott Architects]

As an architect, I find that one of the most exciting things about corporate office design is its ever-changing and evolving nature. More than ever, trends are changing rapidly as a reflection of tremendous advances in technology, the environmental movement, and the strength or weakness of the employment market. Today, there are several significant design trends that are having a profound impact on our industry, including the “green phenomenon,” demand for high-tech office space, a return to more private offices, and a turn away from the ubiquitous “office landscape” plan.

Green buildings, or sustainable facilities, are rapidly gaining momentum. New development, tenant improvements, and building renovations are all subject to green initiatives as more companies look to incorporate these elements into their spaces. For architects, this is welcome news because we no longer have to convince clients that we can design green while still being conscious of their bottom-line needs.

There are numerous ways to incorporate green into buildings aside from solar panels or Energy Star features. Lightbulbs with dimmer switches; recycled materials in furniture, floors, and wall coverings; and even composting and/or waterless toilet systems are just a few. It is refreshing that both tenants and landlords are becoming more aware of green building design. It allows us to explore other creative design alternatives.

The demand for high-tech office space design is another trend that is increasingly popular among tenants who are either moving into new spaces or retrofitting their existing spaces. With the tremendous technological advances that have been occurring over the past several years, companies are requiring space that features Wi-Fi capabilities, larger floor plates, and tremendous power and data center functions. Every corporation today is cognizant of having its space designed to accommodate

technological infrastructure, not only people. This new awareness puts a premium on flexibility and reorganizational potential because of the rapid changes in tel-data and information retrieval systems.

Another trend in corporate office design is a return to private offices, which was a trend in the 80s and 90s, and a move away from the current trend of open spaces. The reason for the increasing popularity of more traditional offices is the fact that a great many corporations are maintaining current staffing levels or even reducing head counts. With companies continuing to invest in technology, there is less of a demand for new employees and therefore a reduced need for square footage.

Designing for a company that is downsizing its office space requires organizing space so that there are fewer cubicles and “carrels.” This trend, called “hotelling workstations,” is common among companies that are more frequently employing individuals who spend most of their time on the road or mostly work from home and only need part-time workstations in the actual office. The construction of more private office space is oftentimes a cost-effective business decision because the construction of this type of space is typically built into landlords’ work letters, whereas with open space planning,

workstations are considered furniture, which is a cost that is normally the responsibility of the tenant. Because of these trends, as well as for economic purposes, companies will continue to demand increased productivity and therefore be less inclined to over-commit to space.

The challenging and rewarding aspect of an architect’s job is keeping up with the evolving needs of each unique client. New products, materials, and innovations are being introduced to the marketplace at an increasingly rapid rate. In order to be fully effective today in understanding and anticipating clients’ needs in a change-dominated business culture, architects and designers must become change agents themselves.

About the Author

Barry Poskanzer, AIA, is a principal and partner at Poskanzer Skott Architects, a full-service architectural design and planning firm headquartered in Ridgewood, New Jersey. Since 1972, Poskanzer has been building on its reputation as one of the region’s most active and respected organizations. The firm services an impressive client roster in the municipal/public works, healthcare, office, industrial, special needs housing, multi-family residential, retail, education, and daycare sectors.



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Barry is a graduate of Cornell University's College of Architecture, Art, and Planning. He has had extensive experience as a developer of private real estate holdings in the New

York area. His pro bono work has included serving as chairperson of the Construction Board of Appeals in Ridgewood for eight years, chairperson of the Allendale Beautification

Program, and a consultant for many nonprofit organizations.

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