FUTURE PROOF CALL CENTER FURNITURE DESIGN

Change is constant in the workplace and the best way to ‘future proof’ a call center is to design a flexible environment. With changing technologies and customer demands, furniture design has never been more important. Since none of us know what the future holds, the best way to design a call center is to make it adaptable to potential needs. This white paper discusses issues you should take into consideration when furnishing your work environment.

When considering furniture, a few items to keep in mind for future functionality are green furniture, colors/aesthetics, flexible solutions, and ergonomics.

First, what is green furniture, and why is it important? A few characteristics of green furniture include recycled content, the environmental policy of the manufacturer, and indoor air emissions.

Recycled content means the amount of recycled material in the furniture and how much of it will be able to be recycled after it’s useful life. Typically, the metal components, panel substrate material, fabrics, and plastics that compose a workstation can be recycled.

A manufacturer with a commitment to sustainability will have environmental policy in place so that you can be sure that the company is a responsible corporate citizen. Ask to see a copy of the policy if it is not readily available on their website.

Look for a furniture system that meets LEED indoor air standards and is certified as a low-emitting product. One certification to look for is meeting the BIFMA M7.1 Test Method and X7.1 Performance Standard, as it currently represents the highest regarded testing option by the broad scientific community.

So, why is green furniture important? Green furniture contributes to a better indoor environment. Many of today’s airtight/energy-efficient buildings operate on a minimal amount of outside make-up air – which can result in increased indoor VOC concentrations. This condition combined with lower ventilation rates, higher occupant densities, and greater use of chemicals in interior furnishings often translates into more reported allergen problems, odor complaints and sick building issues. Use of low-VOC and formaldehyde emitting (BIFMA compliant) furniture will serve to reduce these types of problems. Selecting furniture with the a focus on the preservation of our earth and employee health will help your business stand the test of time.

Moving on to design, a focus on the colors/aesthetics of the furniture and surroundings will create an atmosphere of harmony by combining comfort and elegance. With regards to designing a future proof call center consider the color selections of the furniture, natural design elements, and natural light.

To make a statement with color while keeping the furniture system and surroundings generally neutral, use colorful chairs, bold workstation accent panels and paint.

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Corner 3’x5’ Agent  
Raised Supervisor  
Cluster Agent Stations
These items can be updated at a lower cost over time while allowing higher-cost items such as carpet and the furniture system to remain in place. Natural design elements can be incorporated through the use of acrylic panels in reception stations and common areas. Popular designs include acrylic panels with leaves, flowers, and grass. Designing with natural light in mind obviously creates more daylight, but a few of the other benefits are energy savings, reduced pollution, and improved working and learning environments.

Flexible furniture designs compliment changing technology, which is important for future proof design. Even though more technology is used in call centers than ever before, we will always need a place to put it and a place to use it. The best workstation for agents will be one that has proper work area to perform all of the tasks required. Consider designing for the flow of the room, maximizing available space, and selecting modular furniture vs built-ins.

To have your center remain functional in the future, keep in mind the flow on the call center floor when designing your center. Creating a nice flow means having appropriate aisle space, paths to common areas such as restrooms, cafeterias, and break rooms, and having the best agent/supervisor ratio for the center. Also look for a system that will let you replace panels as needed without dismantling the entire furniture system. The ability to replace only panels allows reconfigurations at a minimal cost, time, and disruption since panels can be replaced as needed instead of an entire workstation. This ability will also allow for an easy change of color schemes as trends change, while keeping all of the workstations usable and in place.

When planning your center, realize that wasted space is space that can never be recovered. As real estate costs rise, and buildings shrink, maximizing space will continue to be important. To avoid unused space, consider using a 1” thick panel system with custom design capabilities. With a one-inch panel system, you may be able to expect additional stations within the floor plan, increased workspace or aisle space per employee, and/or the ability to build/lease less square footage; in any event, this positively impacts the bottom line. Custom design capabilities will allow the furniture to work around columns and other design obstacles, which will optimize available floor plan space.

Unlike casework, certain modular systems furniture can be easily reconfigured as needed. The ability to reconfigure means that workstations can be moved into different departments or updated as needs change. Finally, flexibility, and more specifically ergonomic flexibility, is critical to the station design. This flexibility should be built in through the use of adjustable work surfaces or keyboard mechanisms, adjustable monitor support arms, and of course seating that is adjustable. These features become even more critical in a multiple shift environment; the stations must be ergonomically correct for short, tall and in-between employees.

The design and comfort of the stations can have a significant impact on such things as repetitive motion injuries (and hence worker’s comp claims and insurance premiums) and employee comfort and retention. The design of the center has both a direct (size and number of stations, etc.) and an indirect (employee turnover/health related costs) impact on the cost of running the center.

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![Bold Paint](image1)

![Marker Boards](image2)

![Adjustable Keyboards](image3)
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So when the time comes, design a call center that will meet the technology and people needs of the future by designing with future change in mind. Remember that change in the workplace is constant and you can design an environment to be flexible and meet your needs for years to come.

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