



Bridging the Gap Between Furniture and Technology: IT directors and facility managers are taking a more active role in specifying furniture

EVEN IF THE IDEA OF BIG BROTHER WATCHING YOU VIA A DESK WIRED WITH SENSORS SCARES YOU, WE SEEM TO BE MOVING IN THAT DIRECTION.

BY SCOTT LESIZZA, FOUNDING PRINCIPAL OF WORKWELL PARTNERS

When Workwell Partners was founded in 2002, it was common across the industry for contract furniture dealers to simply serve as a “bid house” for companies looking to furnish their offices. Fast forward to today, we’ve had to shift our business approach as clients have become more involved and informed. This is particularly true of facility managers, information technology (IT) directors and even HR staff. New work styles and the proliferation of technology demand a more planned approach that jointly considers furniture and technology, which explains why we’re seeing these key players seeking more dialogue on which furnishings will best suit their needs. Timing is also a factor. While most offices anticipate changing their furnishings every seven to 10 years, technology is constantly evolving and only has an expected life cycle of 18-24 months. Therefore, to address your workspace needs and future-proof your office furnishings, key organizational players need to work together.

A Haworth white paper titled “Enabling the Organic Workspace: Emerging Technologies that Focus on People, Not Just Space,” explains it best. “Workspace planning and furniture decisions greatly impact workers’ abilities to use their technology, and, thus, work effectively. However, in the planning process, often little consideration is given to what technologies will be implemented, how individuals and groups will use them and the furniture capabilities required to support their use. This disconnect between workspace and technology can lead to poor office design and reduced employee performance.”

Recently, we have worked on a number of projects where IT directors and HR staff have taken a more active role in the design of space, often times collaborating with their facility managers. Many of these projects have been FINTEC (Financial Technology) companies. Virtually all of their revenue comes from programmers and engineers that design algorithms to gain split second advantages in the market.

The IT directors within these firms have had a

very strong say in the type of furniture that goes into the workspace. This has ultimately been extremely useful since they have valuable insight into how to keep their firm’s engineers happy and productive. CPUs will need to have easy access (if CPUs are even required). Laptops need to be easily stored and secured. Docking stations on desks (or in drawers or pedestals below) need to be very plug-and-play compatible to address growing needs for advanced technologies and personal devices.

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The highest visibility areas are conference rooms and collaborative areas where technology is shared efficiently. Very often you have IT and facilities on opposite sides of the room, and furniture vendors and AV contractors crossing lines because they don’t understand each other’s businesses. These rooms are often some of the more expensive and highly visible in the space, so you will begin to see furniture and IT firms partnering to offer a more efficient end product to the client.

Even if the idea of Big Brother watching you via a desk wired with sensors scares you, we seem to be moving in that direction. It’s hard to disagree that ultimately data-driven technology will help business owners and facility managers make more informed decisions to better serve their employees. It won’t be long until modular systems are implemented with a range of sensors that can be incorporated into walls, ceilings or even furniture partitions. This data will build better awareness of the true activities occurring in the workplace so the smart systems can respond intelligently to support the needs of occupants in an organic way. **BoF**