The Office of 2025

Six Trends Driving the Future of Office Design

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Welcome to Your Office of the Very Near Future

The year is 2025. You walk through the doors of your office, greet your co-workers, enjoy a few sips of coffee, and start the day. At first glance, your workplace bears some resemblance to the old, “open office” spaces of the previous decade, except that productivity is so much higher. People are energized and comfortable as they engage with their work and each other.

Neither you nor your officemates are tethered to one specific desk. Everyone ostensibly works off their tablets/phablets/smartphones. These advanced mobile devices enable writing, design, video, analysis, reporting and collaboration, while still supporting voice, text, search, scheduling and project management tasks. Except that you rarely use these devices the way you once did, with your head constantly craned downward – a posture, circulation and mood killer, as well as a literal headache. So unhealthy. So 2019.

You still use your devices' built-in screens for quick information checks and occasional private messages. But most of the time, you're wirelessly connected to the spaces and screens that best support the work you need to do. You might start the day meeting in a collaborative space where different team members project content and ideas onto a giant, high-definition screen, for collaboration and demonstration. From there, you move to a quieter, semi-private work pod where you can focus on projects while engaging with co-workers, asking and answering quick questions, perhaps making lunch plans or chatting about a news item. Maybe you're plugged into headphones, following a webinar on one screen while keeping track of messages on another. Or, you might move to a closed-door office to conduct a call with a client or focus deeply on work that cannot be interrupted, keeping multiple windows of activity on a single large screen. It all depends on what you're doing, how and with whom who you need to be working.

> In the office of the future, the personalization of your space — from the vacation photos on your screen background to your app settings and reminders — goes with you to whatever workspace you use. So, even in the absence of "owned" workspaces, you're immensely comfortable.

As soon as you check into any of these workspaces, a signal from your device sends information to your desk, chair, lighting, monitor and monitor arm, automatically, quickly and smoothly adjusting them to one of your pre-set comfort profiles. From there, you might make a few tiny changes, but otherwise, you're ready to get things done! The personalization of your space – from the vacation photos on your screen background to your app settings and reminders – goes with you to whatever workspace you use. So, even in the absence of "owned" workspaces, you're immensely comfortable – more than back in the day when you spent most of your time at a standard desk. The customizations are so automatic and specific across every spatial axis that no one ever feels like they're using temporary, shared, or someone else's space.

The most visible difference between the office of today and the office of 2025 may be in the people, who represent multiple generations – from Gen Z and Millenial to Gen X and Baby Boomers. All in an environment designed to be both adaptive and kinetic, with no one sitting or standing in one place all day. Everyone is energized, engaged, productive and healthy.

Interrelated Trends Indicate This Future

While no one can predict the future, we have identified six interrelated trends that make the above scenario seem highly likely:

TREND 1 | Continued Growth and Influence of the Digital Workplace

To say that digital technology dominates most workplaces is an exercise in the obvious. However, it is valid to note that digital technology innovations are continuing to explode at an accelerated rate, with no sign of stopping, meaning that businesses worldwide will become even more digitally-driven, which has several implications for office design:

- **More mobile.** Mobile and tablet internet usage surpassed desktop usage for the first time in 2016[1] and mobile devices (including smartphones, tablets and hybrid "phablets") are continuing to become increasingly essential to our work and lives, thanks to continually growing processing capability, storage capacity and other functionality.

- **More flexible, distributed workplaces.** As more (if not most) of our work is performed and managed via mobile devices, we will likely see more remote working – particularly in businesses with locations distributed throughout the U.S., or even the world. But this trend is hardly limited to large enterprises. The capabilities and interactions enabled within an office environment will encourage more businesses to promote remote working in satellite offices or, more likely, co-working spaces. These shared office environments have grown at a rate of 200% in recent years and are expected to support 3.8 million co-working members by 2020 and 5.1 million by 2022.[2]

- **More smart everything.** The growth in technology is making its way into far more than our phones and computers. Improvements in wireless connectivity, WiFi and over-the-air bandwidth, sensor capabilities and other advances are enabling smart technology in almost anything – from lighting and environmental controls that respond to the presence of people to cars that adjust the position of the driver's seat upon sensing the car key.

- **Overcoming mobile screen limitations.** Even as more of our computing will be happening on small, mobile devices, their small screens still cannot offer enough visual real estate to handle much of our work. Which means that the need to quickly and automatically connect our devices to large screens – a capability already enabled by Bluetooth technology and apps like Apple AirPlay – will be necessary to help workers better manage multiple, complex tasks simultaneously and shift between devices.

TREND 2 | Our Slouching Causes Health Problems – And Our Workplaces are Part of the Problem

We saw it coming at the turn of the millennium: 80% of Americans reported having back pain at some point[3] and up to 54% of workers were experiencing neck pain.[4] And these trends only continue with back pain being the leading cause of disability and one of the most common reasons for missing work, worldwide.[5] In fact, back pain accounts for more than 264 million lost work days a year – two full work days for every full-time worker in the United States.[6] No wonder back and neck pain costs Americans and American businesses between $50-$100 billion per year.[7]

According to the American Posture Institute, much of the problem is because we're slouching more now than ever before. And one of the main reasons behind the trend is our increased use of technology, particularly our mobile devices. Daily use of computers for two to three hours is the threshold for neck and shoulder pain and daily use of five hours is the threshold for low back pain – and most workers spend at least that amount.

Worse is the impact of mobile devices on our posture, with increased usage causing a condition known as "text neck" or "tech neck," in which the curve of the neck, which usually angles backward, is being reversed due to looking down at mobile devices for hours each day, causing increasing neck strain as the head cranes further forward. In fact, a report authored by Dr. Todd Lanman of Cedars Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, California, notes that at 45 degrees – the average angle of the head while browsing on a mobile phone – the

weight of the head places 49 pounds of stress on the neck.[8] And the implications for health go far beyond neck and back pain, including knee stress and exacerbated arthritis, poor circulation, fatigue, jaw pain, breathing issues and headaches.[9]

When we look at the combination of this trend and the digital trend, it becomes clear that the problem is not going away and today's typical workplaces aren't making things better – yet.

TREND 3 | Increasing Need For Healthier Workplaces

The good news is that we are also seeing a growing trend toward creating office spaces and products that foster better health and ergonomics. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, businesses that actively promote the health of their employees benefit themselves as well as their workers. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention reports that productivity losses related to health problems cost U.S. employers $1,685 per employee per year or $225.8 billion annually. And a study in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* indicates that the increased productivity of healthier employees is worth an additional $471.4 million to U.S. businesses in annual savings.[10]

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Given the previously noted trends toward the impact of mobile usage on health at work, businesses will need to take an active interest in ensuring that their workplaces don't exacerbate – or do actively help reverse – health problems. An increasing number of businesses are adding health and wellness benefits to their workplaces, in addition to medical benefits, including everything from on-site fitness centers and gym membership discounts to smoking cessation and weight-loss programs. Likewise, healthcare providers are offering incentives and benefits to both companies and employees when the business takes advantage of proactive strategies to support employee health and wellness. And, the architectural and design community is continuing to drive the trend toward Active Design, in which buildings and the spaces within them are designed to encourage physical activity, health and wellbeing.

TREND 4 | Shrinking Office Space

The combination of the trend toward increased mobility combined with the rising costs of real estate is leading to smaller workspaces and desk sizes. Thinner, flat-screen monitors allow for shallower desk space. As offices keep more of their documents electronically, there is less of a need for large desks. Add in real estate costs and it's easy to see why flexible workspaces and co-working spaces are on the rise and the average amount of space per employee is shrinking. According to *Building Design + Construction*, workers had an average of 300 square feet each in 2001. By 2010, space allocation was down to 225 square feet per person and in 2012, it dropped to 176 square feet per person.[11]

The office-less, cubicle-less, "open office," which began gaining momentum between 2010 and 2015, was one attempt to respond to the shrinking office and desk space trend. The concept had merit; however, its practical applications have brought issues to light. Open offices can be noisy and distracting, they may yield more sick days for employees, and they can decrease productivity. That said, the need to do more with less space is unlikely to go away.

TREND 5 | Continued Growth of the Multigenerational Workforce

Today's workplaces may be more multigenerational than any before, with a workforce whose members include an almost even distribution between:

- Generation Z (born in 1996 or later)
- Millennials/Generation Y (born between 1977 and 1995)
- Generation X (born between 1965 and 1976)
- Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964)

According to Forbes magazine, having a multigenerational workforce offers a distinct advantage for companies today. The wide range of ideas and knowledge from a broad group of people can serve the company well, and help employees excel in their work.[12]

> The implications of these interrelated trends are significant for businesses and their end users, whose needs are driving new creativity from commercial interior designers, office furniture dealers and facility managers.

Successful workplaces are responding to the needs of these different types of employees. For instance, tech-savvy Generation Z and Millennial employees may have grown up learning to do everything on their phones, save for the gaming they might have done on large screen TVs. The same style screens in their workplaces could support ease of working and productivity. In conjunction with the previous trend toward "tech neck" combined with the trend toward workplaces that encourage health, it's easy to see the need for work environments that can combat the health problems that come with constant phone usage.

Members of Generation X are now in their 40s and 50s, meaning that if their aging eyes aren't struggling with presbyopia (farsightedness) now, they soon will be. Baby Boomers are working longer than their colleagues of previous generations, resisting retirement until their 70s or even later. These circumstances indicate the need for increasingly larger, high-resolution screens for their work, as well as adjustable workspaces to accommodate for aging joints.

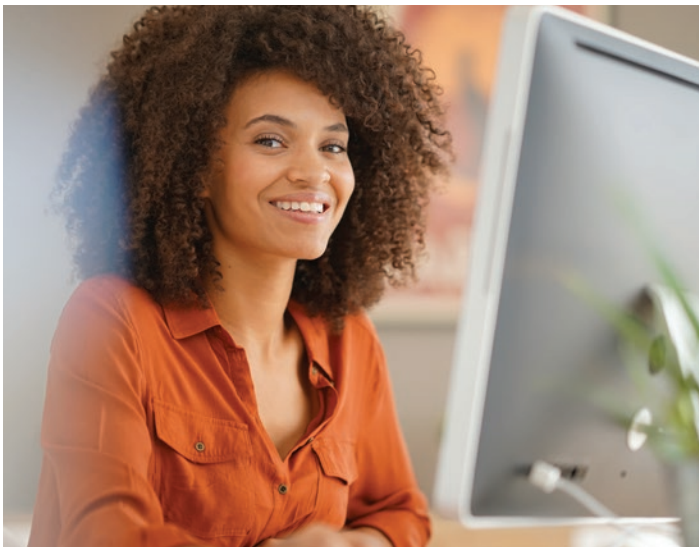
TREND 6 | Acceleration of Changes in Design

If it seems like design itself is evolving faster than ever, there are good reasons for this acceleration. Advances in software and modeling, including increasingly affordable 3D printing, allow for dramatically shorter design iterations and testing cycles. The shift from "Industrial Design" toward "Experiential Design" is also forcing designers to continually pursue new concepts, materials, styles and capabilities (for instance, blending digital connectivity and screens into physical items that never had them before). Finally, product life-cycles are getting shorter because the ability to analyze market trends and needs is more sophisticated than ever before. All of this combines to enable professionals to explore alternatives and ideas, model and test them, and rapidly get them to market.

Implications

The implications of these interrelated trends are significant for businesses and their end users, whose needs are driving new creativity from commercial interior designers, office furniture dealers, facility managers and other specifiers – who, in turn, need new levels of responsiveness from office furniture and accessory manufacturers.

Today's businesses are already starting to respond to the major trends driving the future of office design: digital technology, the effect of that technology on employee wellbeing, the need for healthier work environments, shrinking workspaces, multigenerational workforces and accelerating design changes.



This response often includes:

- Easily adjustable furniture designed to encourage better body positioning and movement that can overcome the effects of "tech neck" and of sitting or standing in one position for too long
- Multiple-sized monitors, desks and tables whose height, angle and position can be easily changed automatically to meet the individual and group needs of employees
- Customized, adjustable lighting and wire management

However, to truly drive the innovations of the 2025 office, businesses and their interior designers, facility managers, specifiers and purchasers should also seek two essential capabilities from the furniture manufacturers who serve them:

Design Complexity Management | The "smarter open office" will require sophisticated technology, which must be made accessible and intuitive for everyone from designers, purchasers, specifiers and dealers to installers, facility managers and end-users. Nimble, responsive manufacturers who also deliver this type of complexity management – from the systems that drive height-adjustable bases to the proper balancing and installation of task lighting systems and monitor arms – can offer a distinct advantage to commercial interior designers.

> "We went from 'ask' to roll out in less than six months"
>
> Dave Fox, *Chief Executive Officer, Innovative Office Products*

That complexity management should also extend to the process of specifying office furniture and components. Any designer, specifier or purchaser knows that the detailed specifications required for any office installation are often extremely – perhaps even unnecessarily – complicated. HAT Contract has taken steps to simplify that process, trimming down vernacular in their online pricing guides and offering direct support and recommendations, when necessary. The result is one of the easiest, most accessible specification and purchasing experiences in the furniture industry.

Agile Collaboration | Recognizing the macro-trends driving business design is only part of what will enable the office of 2025. Businesses and their designers who want to drive that future must also look to partner with manufacturers who can respond with agility and collaboration. For instance, in late 2018, the designers serving a major California Bay-area technology enterprise found themselves searching for height adjustable bases with specific capabilities and a design aesthetic that they didn't see in the market. They turned to HAT Contract, a leader in providing ergonomic, space saving products for workplaces. The HAT Contract team responded by mobilizing suppliers and internal designers to adapt existing components, create prototypes, test them, and roll them out to the customer organization. "We went from 'ask' to roll out in less than six months," affirms Innovative Office Products CEO, Dave Fox. The resulting product, the Industrial Finish Hi-HAT Base, will be shown to the marketplace at the 2019 NeoCon conference in Chicago, Illinois.

It's easy to see how today's trends indicate an office of 2025 that could deliver significant advantages to businesses and their employees. And while no one can predict the future, those who recognize its potential today are well positioned to create it.

About Innovative/HAT Contract

HAT Contract (www.hatcontract.com) is a leading North American designer, contract manufacturer and distributor of ergonomic office products, including height adjustable tables, power/data beams, drawer pedestals, dividers, work surfaces and electrical components for benching and bases. Located in San Jose, Calif., the company was acquired by Easton, Pa.-based Innovative in 2018. Innovative (www.innovativeworkspaces.com) is an award-winning designer and manufacturer of ergonomic products and accessories that improve health, wellness and productivity across a range of work environments, including the office, healthcare and point of sale markets.

More information about HAT Contract can be found at www.hatcontract.com.

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Notes

[1]http://gs.statcounter.com/press/mobile-and-tablet-internet-usage-exceeds-desktop-for-first-time-worldwide

[2]Global Coworking Unconference Conference research report, http://usa.gcuc.co/2018-global-coworking-forecast-30432-spaces-5-1-million-members-2022/

[3]Rubin DI. Epidemiology and Risk Factors for Spine Pain. Neurol Clin. 2007; May;25(2):353-71.

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[6]The Hidden Impact of Musculoskeletal Disorders on Americans, United State Bone and Joint Initiative, 2018.

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[8]https://www.newstarget.com/2019-02-17-mobile-device-overuse-to-cause-wave-of-text-neck-disorders-with-serious-neck-and-back-pain-consequences.html

[9]https://health.usnews.com/wellness/slideshows/10-ways-poor-posture-can-harm-your-health?onepage

[10]https://journals.lww.com/joem/Abstract/2013/10000/Improving_Employee_Productivity_Through_Improved.3.aspx

[11]https://www.bdcnetwork.com/workplace-design-trends-make-way-millennials

[12]https://www.forbes.com/sites/wesgay/2017/10/20/multigeneration-workforce/#7f116be4bfd4