

2010 White Paper Report: Call Center Trends/Best Practice

In order to change the fundamental patterns of call centers, we must understand the evolving trends and identify key business drivers that make them successful.

*“Today’s call centers have evolved to become sophisticated, high-tech showcases of services, support, and sales. Meanwhile, the look and layout of call centers is changing to keep up with the new demands being placed on them.”**

- **Customer Focus – improved call quality and response time.**
(The better collectors are treated, the better they’ll treat customers.)
- **Address training for new hires and continuing product support.**
(The better collectors are prepared, better results.)
- **Provide appropriate and accessible amenities and support spaces.**
(5 min. breaks in a new environment to escape the every day grind.)
- **Incorporate branding and identity within the call center.**
(Team work and specialized groups form camaraderie.)
- **Recruitment and retention issues.**
(Better employee benefits and a pleasant environment promote positive attitudes.)
- **Accommodate flexibility and multi-tasking.**
(Investing in technology and promoting office policies by the people.)
- **Address needs of outbound vs. inbound operations.**
(Specialized Teams form collaboration, office within an office.)
- **Required separation for security.**
(Investing in technology and support areas promotes different environments.)
- **After-Hours requirements – 24/7 operations?**
(Investing in technology and building infrastructure promotes different environments.)
- **Ability to accept business interruptions/traffic – call routing, etc.**
(Investing in technology and building infrastructure promotes different environments.)
- **Time zone coverage.**
(Investing in technology and building infrastructure along with office policy promotes different environments, i.e. satellite offices, different shifts.)
- **Shared workspaces / hot desking / hoteling.**
(Incorporating workplace strategies will help increase efficiencies.)

CALL CENTER WORKPLACE STRATEGIES

The following alternative office concepts can improve productivity, comfort, and improve efficiencies. Cost reduction can be achieved in several ways, some require capital investment, and others do not. Some benefits of cost reduction are tangible and quantifiable in hard dollars. Some benefits are more qualitative in nature, such as improvements in productivity and employee moral.

- Address alternate planning opportunities to provide increased efficiency.
- Provide proper quantity and distribution of support spaces for training, coaching, break, etc. RE: Call Center Metrics.
- Incorporate technology including on-line tools for reps and flat panel monitors-both resulting in less space required on desktops and less strain on the eyes.
- Provide appropriate building systems infrastructure and design systems to accommodate future requirements.
- Provide energetic workplace that contributes to increased employee moral, productivity and retention.

There are five basic objectives in a real estate cost reduction;

- Reduction of real estate requirements, occupancy costs and operating expenses.
- Cost Reductions that result from process improvements (management change and re-engineering).
- Cost-efficiencies that require an investment which must be measured as a rate of investment.
- Qualitative improvements, such as productivity, competitiveness and morale.
- “LEED” building specifications (sustainable design).

There are six major alternative office concepts to help achieve the five basic objectives.

- Flexible/Multi-purpose rooms.
(Rooms that have the infrastructure to accommodate multiple space requirements)
- Hoteling concepts.
(Space that is not dedicated but reserved for a timeframe)
- Instant office
(Space that can facilitate the demands of today’s business with tomorrow’s technology)
- Shared Office
(Different companies divided into the same space sharing centralized auxiliary spaces)
- Universal size offices
(A non-hierarchy space with same square footage per office)
- Wireless / Virtual office-VPN
(Today’s office of the future)

CALL CENTER WORKPLACE STRATEGIES

The typical icon of a call center is the telemarketing firm, however today they range from technical support, customer service, telephone banking, catalog sales, surveys, collections, and crisis intervention.

Many call centers are becoming specialized. Call Centers today are using branding as a means to distinguish them as the premier, “Contact Centers, Customer Care Centers, or Help Desk.”

Call Centers are adapting to change, a building that facilitates growth and flexibility can help call centers evolve through time. The evolving call centers will evolve into different markets and provide different service for new clients as well as their existing clients.

Typical call center growth is rapid, extending from 50% - 70% is common!-however many call centers find themselves locked into buildings that will not allow flexibility and growth.

Data and Communication is the foundation to any Call Center and the integration of the newest technology is the common theme to allow a Call Center to evolve through the value of service and productivity. Call Centers are increasingly the main point of contact between a company and its customers. The use of technology used today will have to be better and faster than tomorrows. The integration of technology is most successful when reconfiguration to the over all space is nonexistence.

Buildings with the appropriate infrastructure that can facilitate technology already have raised floor capabilities to secure cable-management and allow workstations to be easily access and can easily change. The cost of raised floor is about \$6.00/SF.***

Quality of life is very difficult to measure as typically in real estate, “dollars per square feet”. It is the Initial cost vs. the Residual cost and only time will truly measure the success of the investment. Quality of life can be defined through a better light source, newer workstation and workstation configuration, noise control, HVAC- “heating ventilation and air conditioning control, ergonomic furniture, and newer technology. Quality of life can also be defined as special employee amenities.

CALL CENTER WORKPLACE STRATEGIES

Light source is in many cases overlooked. Computers produce their own illumination and many call centers are far brighter than they need to be. Harsh lighting creates monitor glare that causes eyestrain and headaches, lowering productivity and potentially increasing turnover. An Indirect light source which is typically a premium above your typical 2 x 4 parabolic direct light fixture can be a minimum difference of \$1.50/SF.***

Workstations in a call center application are typically looked as a sea of “ice-cubes”. This type of configuration although very efficient is not necessarily the most optimal configuration. Many configurations can offer a more team work configuration with superior sight lines such as clusters resembling a pod, pinwheel, horseshoe, or “H”. Team type configuration can offer a sense of camaraderie which becomes priceless. Workstations are becoming very technological friendly and ergonomically correct. The economics of furniture has changed since “911”, and the list price on new furniture has been reduced as much as 70%.*** The used or refurbished furniture can be purchased as low as \$0.25 on the dollar.***

Noise Control in a call center application is typically nonexistence. Noise can fray collector’s nerves and jeopardize their productivity and composure. Or worse a hum of background chatter sounds becomes unprofessional on the other end of the line.

A number of design techniques can help reduce noise among them: sound-absorbing ceiling tiles, carpeting, and wall coverings, strategically located plants, artwork, and sound-absorbing fabric panels. The ultimate noise control is the application of “white-noise”, and the more technological at a premium is “pink-noise”. Both applications mask a broad spectrum of sounds, including the frequencies of human speech, lowering the intelligibility of neighboring conversations by as much as two-thirds.

The “pink-noise” application targets voice-spectrum frequencies so that their sound masking can be operated at lower volume. The “pink-noise” can be installed directly to office furnishings, making them easy to remove and reinstall if necessary.

The price of “white-noise” depending on the manufacture is about \$1.50/SF.***
The price of “pink-noise” depending on the manufacture is about \$2.50/SF.***

CALL CENTER WORKPLACE STRATEGIES

HVAC -“heating ventilation and air conditioning control” is in many cases overlooked and many call centers settle for the landlord’s building standards and not the minimal base building criteria for office environments. Performance specifications for minimal base building criteria for office environments is a major factor in grading a building which determines rent rates. Many landlords will grade their buildings higher than the base building criteria for office environments. After hour rates for HVAC is usually the major cost for any operation, and with sub-standard HVAC equipment the loss factor of efficiency can be as much as 30%***.

The major cost of any office relocation build out is the HVAC systems, many buildings will provide each floor with the main lines to the supply and returns but the individual units for a number of systems needs to be addressed during lease negotiations. The cost associated with HVAC systems can be as much as 1/3*** the cost of the over all construction.

Ergonomic Furniture is in many cases the last line item and the lowest priority on the budget for office operations. However the economics of furniture has changed since “911”, and the list price on new furniture has been reduced as much as 70%***. The used or refurbished furniture can be purchased as low as \$0.25 on the dollar***.

Seating is the first line of defense for comfort, adjustability is crucial for height, obviously, but also for armrests, lumbar support, seat back angle, and seat pan angle. Controls should be easy to reach from a seated position. The options for an ergonomic chair is essential especially for different shifts, typically there are no (2) people with the exact body dimensions.

Work Surfaces are becoming as adjustable as an ergonomic chair; the options allow collectors to occasionally conduct business while standing or moving about, a welcome break from the usual routine. Many work surfaces allow the same flexibility as keyboard-trays. However the combination of the two is optimal. Monitors that are integrated with the work surface is also optimal, flat-screens use 60% less energy and take up less space than your conventional monitor.

Panels and Screens are great to help define space, absorb noise, and help create a visual relief. The trend is shorter panels and screens ranging from 42” to 48”, this is optimal height for both collaboration and privacy.

CALL CENTER WORKPLACE STRATEGIES

“**Special employee amenities**” are in many cases the lowest priority on the budget for office operations or simply nonexistent. This is an investment that measures office retention recruiting and over all office moral. Special employee amenities are investments that is measured through time and can not be measured in real estate terms through \$/SF. However we can amortize the investment over time. Special employee amenities offer the employee to escape the nature of work and include the following;

- On-site fitness centers.
- Jogging Tracks
- Tennis Courts
- Game Rooms
- On-site day care
- Cafeterias
- Grocery stores
- ATM's
- Dry-Cleaners
- Fed-Ex / Post-Office

“**Market**”- There is currently 1,055,887 SF. vacant in the Eastern/Western Corridor Chicago submarket area with a 25.5% vacancy rate. **However 10% of the vacant square footage in the Eastern/Western Corridor Chicago submarket is applicable to the above workplace strategies.**

CALL CENTER METRICS

Call center metrics varies with the type of call center operation, amenity spaces, extent of training, etc.

Target SF/Person:

- 110 SF/Person – 130 SF/Person
Extremely efficient, definitely using workplace strategies
- 130 SF/Person – 150 SF/Person
Efficient, some workplace strategies in place
- 150 SF/Person – 170 SF/Person
Average across the nation, need to evaluate and increase efficiency
- 170 SF/Person – 190 SF/Person
Not very efficient, need to evaluate and increase efficiency

Ratios:

- 10 – 15 collectors** / (1) corporate account
- 15 – 20 collectors** / (1) supervisor
- 20-50 collectors** / (1) training room (10-12) people
- 20-50 collectors** / (1) coaching room (4-6) people