

DESIGNING FOR THE ELECTRONIC OFFICE

... or, So What If The Boss's Wife Has A Flair For Decorating?

By Michael Cooper

Much has been published lately on the subject of ergonomics in today's electronic offices. Most of the articles are written to help the inhabitants of these offices become aware of the ongoing advances in support equipment and furniture, and how they relate to their own particular job function.

But when the powers that be finally decide that a change in the office is needed to accommodate all of the electronic paraphernalia that they so heavily invested in, who do they call, if anyone? The office manager? The executive secretary? The (gulp!) boss's wife?

Let's put it this way. When you have a problem with your computer, are you going to call Chemlawn? Of course not! You're going to call a computer expert.

The same logic applies to your office and its everyday functions. If productivity is not as high as you feel it should be, if space is at a premium, if you're using folding tables and side chairs for your computer, if morale is on the skids because the office looks more like a used furniture auction, then call an expert: call an Interior Designer.

Most professional designers have college degrees in Interior Design, and are backed up with years of experience. Due to the very nature of the business, designers, more than anyone, are constantly kept abreast of the latest developments that pertain to interiors, and can determine exactly what solution is best for your particular problem.

Don't let the thought of having to pay for design services prohibit you from seeking professional help. When you think of the money that can be recouped from misused floor space, poor productivity, employee absenteeism, and low morale, then the cost is almost negligible.

Some people wonder why arriving at a solution can take as long as it does. (You want it WHEN?) What some clients don't realize is that no two projects are the same. Each has its own distinct set of circumstances. For example, even though ABC Corporation has the same computer system as XYZ Company, it doesn't necessarily mean that they will have the same support equipment.

For instance, one company may have more interaction between its employees, while the other may feel that total privacy is the key. One has overhead lighting; the other lots of direct sunlight. One has a factory attached to its offices; the other has easy-listening music coming from hidden speakers. Or, just as important, one says spend whatever it takes, while the other wants to know if you have any sources for used chairs under \$20.00, and can't you fit more people into that closet?

Speaking of space, it seems that in most offices there is an unwritten rule: The amount of square feet per person

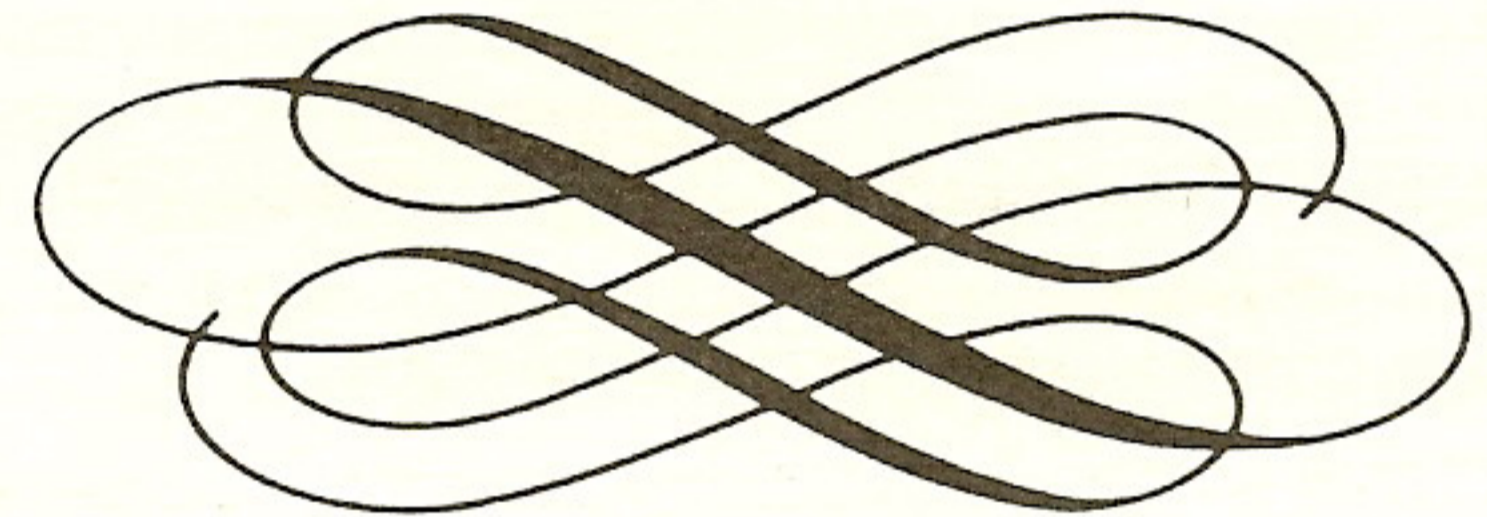
is directly related to the number of personnel and the size of the room. The trouble is, even though job functions change, the amount of space allotted to a particular person doesn't. Therefore, you get a lot of waste, both in floor space and employees.

Designers are superb at making the best possible use of every square inch available, and have even saved companies the expense of constructing new facilities by showing how to better utilize what they were already paying for.

So the next time someone complains about the noise, or you hear that the sales department just landed a big account and you're going to have to support it with fifteen more people, give a designer a call.

They even do windows.

(Michael Cooper is the President of Michael Cooper and Associates, an Interior Design and Space Planning Firm. A graduate designer with 13 years of experience, he is a member of the Institute of Business Designers.)



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