



White Paper

The 10 Costliest Assumptions in Selecting Office Furniture

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1. Assuming Landlord Drawings are Accurate

Throughout my 20 years in business, I have rarely seen any accurate drawings, let alone one provided by a landlord. The original drawing was created for construction, but then workers built it, and it is rare that a building is re-measured to create an accurate as-built drawing. Older buildings, which need to be measured from scratch, often have drawings that are off by feet. Unfortunately, furniture space plans require accurate base drawings. In many situations, these “critical dimensions” are crucial, where an inch or two means fitting or not. Plus, your rent is based on these drawings.

Lesson #1: Have the drawings verified.

2. Assuming Your Layout Won't Change

You've gotten input from all your department heads and reworked the plan 20 times so you are sure that it is finally perfect. Unfortunately, perfect for today may not be perfect next month. Accommodating a growing team, creating more collaborative spaces, reducing your filing space – it's something that's consistently changing, growing and evolving.

I can't tell you how often clients insist that they have an ideal plan, with maximum space usage, insisting they won't ever need to change it, only to turn around a week later and need to make changes. Some furniture systems are far easier to reconfigure than others, so be sure to find out how the systems you are considering will work for you over time.

Lesson #2: Design and choose your furniture for future flexibility even if you are sure you won't need it.

3. Assuming the Furniture Dealer can be Among Your Last Choices

Many people assume that selecting your furniture dealer can be one of your last choices, and that it can be late in the process. An experienced furniture dealer brings a very different perspective to a construction project than does a general contractor or even an architect or interior designer.

Each is valid and contributes different aspects to a successful project. A space plan with lines blocking out workstations and case goods is very different than a drawing with real furniture symbols that are scaled accurately. Since the dealer is responsible for the furniture working and fitting in the space, they will take great care to be sure that what is on paper will actually stand up and won't be in the middle of a column.

Lesson #3: Get your whole team in place early; your furniture dealer can work with your architect – and base plans on reality.

4. Assuming Your Architect's Power and Data Plan are Sufficient

This may come as a surprise, but your furniture plan dictates the power and data locations, not the other way around. Entry feeds into your modular systems, or access to your wall outlets in private offices, has to work around your furniture.

Lesson #4: Have your furniture dealer review the electrical and data plans early – to avoid costly order changes or having to live with the results of poor planning.

5. Assuming Furniture Systems Are Interchangeable Commodities

Panel systems and other types of workstations and office furniture have widely varied features and benefits. To suggest that these systems are interchangeable and that the lowest priced bid is your best option is just a huge mistake.

Depending on the system, floor plan changes can be harder or easier, costly or inexpensive, even possible or not—depending on which system you choose. There are many different product aspects to consider when selecting which bid to accept, from sound absorbency to fit and finish, from design details to durability – just to name a few.

Some panel systems can change height without impacting your data cables, while others can't. Some can easily have the fabric replaced if it gets stained or damaged, others

can't. Production lead times range as well, from roughly two to six weeks or longer. Manufacturer reliability is also on a scale from those that ship on-time, complete and with virtually no freight damage, to others who ship consistently late without notice, incomplete and poorly packaged, leading to frequently damaged deliveries.

Lesson #5: You must evaluate your quotes based in large part on the products and manufacturers used, not just the drawings and prices.

6. Assuming Large Dealers Are “Safer” to Use than Small Dealers

The truth is that there will be a small team that designs, specifies and project manages your project. The caliber of the individuals on the team, and their work load, will determine how well your project goes. The size of the dealership has no bearing, except perhaps in an inverse way. It's often safer to be the most important client in a smaller arena than just another number being processed, and this is true both for the dealer and the manufacturers used.

Lesson #6: Make sure your project is critically important to your dealer and their vendors; ensure that you have top notch talent on your account.

7. Assuming You Can Only Afford What You Can Pay For Today.

Unlike anything attached to the building, furniture, moveable wall systems and demountable modular millwork can be written off on an accelerated schedule. Additionally, furniture, labor and even architects' fees can be bundled with your other large purchases like computers and telephone systems into a lease. The lease duration and terms are negotiated between you and the leasing company directly. As an alternate to either a lease or a loan from your ongoing bank, states such as Illinois and others have negotiated low bank loan rates with specific participating banks in order to encourage investment, and are separate from your line of credit for ongoing operations.

Lesson #7: Talk to your accountant and your furniture dealer about payment programs to keep your cash and lines of credit available for your business operations, not tied up in your furniture.

8. Assuming Refurbished Furniture Is A Better Value Than New.

Think about the expenses and waste involved in refurbished furniture. It takes a lot of labor to dismantle furniture, remove all of the power and data cables, truck it to a warehouse, sort and then store it for an undetermined period.

A large percentage is never sold. The product to be refurbished is then taken out of storage, sorted again, stripped down, repainted and reupholstered. New surfaces are often made to replace old damaged ones. On top of this, transportation is almost never priced into the product, as it is with new.

Lesson #8: Don't believe the hype that refurbished product is a better value than new, do your own comparisons.

9. Assuming Ergonomics Is Too Expensive For Your Office

In large part, ergonomics should be integral to an effective office design that addresses the question: "Are people's work areas designed to minimize physical stresses from reaching, lifting, twisting and performing repetitive activities with awkward postures and known risks?" Of course, the designers must be cognizant of the ways to design work areas to minimize these stresses, and most are not.

Many people in an organization will benefit from having work tools like articulating keyboard trays, monitor arms, footrests, document holders and task lights, which if properly deployed and demonstrated, can increase worker productivity and reduce injury related downtime substantially, more than offsetting the up-front expenses.

Lesson #9: Properly integrated ergonomic design with ergonomic products and education is a small up-front expense with both short and long-term payoffs.

10. Assuming Environmentally Sound Design Is Too Expensive

Earning a LEED accreditation is a major undertaking of time and capital. Incorporating sustainable design into your plan is not. I am very proud that the commercial furniture and interior architecture industries have become leaders in the green movement, and every aspect of the manufacturing process and product has become more efficient and incorporates recycled and recyclable materials.

While some green products are still more expensive than their non-green counterparts, generally the sustainable design movement has made us more efficient. It also bears noting that by buying better made products that last longer than their cheaper alternatives, you can improve the environment by disposing of less waste in landfills.

Lesson #10: Green manufacturing is efficient, green products have become the norm in the industry, and buying quality products keeps our landfills available for the future.

The best lesson is to bring in a real expert to help you avoid all of these and many other common mistakes on your project. Call or email the author, Jeff Meltzer, founder and President of Applied Ergonomics, for a free consultation TODAY to help ensure that YOUR project is a success.

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