Seven Critical Design Elements of Effective Contact Centers

An Interior Concepts White Paper

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Depending upon which study you read, the people side of the contact center business represents about two-thirds of an organization's operating expenses. With so much of the industry's cost and energy concentrated in this area, it makes sense that the center's facilities should be designed with its staff, both agents and managers, in mind.

The term contact center "design" can mean different things to different people. To some it refers exclusively to the edifice or building shell, while to others it means just the interior design or ambience of the work environment. Both are critical aspects of the contact center workplace; however, to us and to our clients, "design" refers to the effective layout of floor plans, ergonomic furniture solutions and effective utilization of space that yields fewer injuries and greater individual and team productivity.

In this paper, we define and explore the seven most critical aspects of effective contact center design from this vantage point, based upon years of field experience and successful installations with satisfied clients.
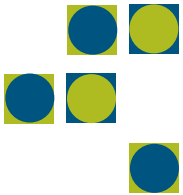
Critical Design Elements 1: Take a holistic view of the overall work flow of the contact center floor when designing the floor plan.

When pressed for time or money, there can be a tendency for organizations to think only about the big picture of their contact center design. However, this thinking can be short-sighted. Instead, planners should think about, and even mentally walk through, the details of the workspace to ensure that all aspects of design have been addressed. Some things to think about include the layout and flow of agent workstations, supervisor, management and scheduler offices, as well as meeting rooms. Additionally, the location of restrooms, break rooms and common areas should be considered. Other critical elements are the often-forgotten design obstacles such as corners, columns, and utility access panels.

Sometimes the best way to determine the ideal floor plan is to try a variety of different floor plan options to maximize the number of agents per square foot while still providing an effective flow for the contact center floor. Many contact centers want workstations that foster teamwork and open communication. Open design elements that offer lower panel heights, step-down or acrylic panels and "dog-bone" – style stations can be most effective. And of course, planners need to ensure that the final floor plan follows OSHA requirements, which vary by state.

Critical Design Elements 2: Workstations should be large enough to accommodate the work flow necessary for agents.

In the not-too-distant past, the norm for contact center furniture or cubicle design was a standard 4-foot-wide workstation. It was thought that this was spacious, as many centers, particularly outbound operations, utilized a mere 3-foot-wide area. Fortunately for agents (and customers), the workstations have graduated in size, with many contact centers using variations of 5-and 6-foot wide designs. Some centers choose to go even larger, depending on the company culture and the tasks or services being performed. "Roominess" is definitely becoming the norm.

Critical Design Elements 3: Provide ergonomic accessories so that each station can be customized for the agent.

In recent years it has been proven that attention to ergonomics can reduce repetitive motion injuries and costs associated with absenteeism and productivity. Some of the most important ergonomic furniture accessories include heavy-duty chairs with multiple adjustments, adjustable keyboard mechanisms or keyboard trays, adjustable monitor arms, wrist rests and even footrests. While initial capital expenditures may be significant, progressive contact centers know that these costs usually pale in comparison to long-term staffing and operating costs of a center. Time and money lost due to employee discomfort and/or injury, which can increase health care and workers' compensation premiums, can quickly exceed the initial investment in the proper equipment and training.

Critical Design Elements 4: Furniture should address specific company needs such as space and design.

Let's face it, one size doesn't fit all when it comes to furniture. It is critical that the furniture adapt to the environment and needs of the contact center — not the other way around. Center leaders should not compromise on anything less than the most productive individual work areas for their employees. For example, companies should invest in developing panel height requirements based on the delicate balance between supervision, noise control and privacy needs, and not on standard available panel heights dictated by furniture manufacturers. If the center can benefit from furniture designs that are in-between standard worksurface and panel sizes, then plan accordingly. The goal is to provide furniture that can best meet the needs of the call center and its workers.

Critical Design Elements 5: Wiring and cables should be totally concealed, yet easily accessible, in the furniture.

If a contact center is designing its own building, the layout of the wiring and cables should be factored in, but when moving into an existing facility careful

consideration must be given to the furniture systems that both conceal unattractive wires, yet also allow for accessibility when required. Be sure to research furniture systems that offer generous channels for wires and cables and that allow connections between stations. Look for furniture with an 8-wire electrical system so that electrically powered items can be plugged directly into the workstation, as opposed to more traditional furniture systems with a base electrical system, where devices are plugged into the base at floor level. The 8-wire system reduces "spaghetti effect" and safety hazards associated with exposed wiring.

Critical Design Elements 6: It is important that the entire facility be user-friendly.

The importance of creating a pleasant work environment should not be underestimated. Incorporate such features as inviting break rooms, secure storage for employee personal items, proper lighting, aesthetically pleasing colors — including furniture fabrics and colors, as well as paint/wall paper/graphic designs — and space-efficient traffic patterns. Also, make the most of your space by creating versatile areas in training rooms. For example, maximize training space by using flip-top tables that can be rolled away when not needed and reconfigured for alternative uses.

Critical Design Elements 7: Utilize "one-stop shopping" manufacturers.

Everyone wants to save time and find vendors they trust to help streamline their decision-making. Look for full-service manufacturers that provide not only agent furniture systems, but also storage cabinets, meeting tables, chairs, and administrative and executive office furniture. Using one furniture provider makes it easy to find replacement or additional parts and makes new purchasing easier when expansion is required. Choosing one manufacturer also means that you are more likely to qualify for volume discounts. In the end, the best approach for effective call center furniture design is to: plan ahead, consider a holistic approach to workspace and partner with experts who will create solutions that fit your center's unique needs.

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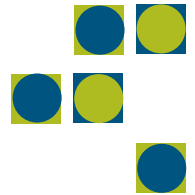
Interior Concepts specializes in designing, manufacturing and installing high quality furniture for contact center environments. We have been manufacturing furniture for contact centers for over 20 years, so we know how to solve the specific design challenges of the contact center environment.

For more information call 800. 678.5550, or visit www.interiorconcepts.com.

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