



outside the cube

How Philadelphia companies are making work a little more fun

The corner office with the big desk may be the traditional sign of success in the workplace, but many companies in the Philadelphia area are kissing convention goodbye when it comes to their office designs. From ping-pong tables to open floor plans, we talked to several Philadelphia CEOs about how thinking outside the cubicle leads to higher employee morale, better teamwork and, ultimately, more success.



WIL REYNOLDS, founder and CEO, SEER Interactive

The dig: SEER Interactive offices are housed in a renovated church (nicknamed the

"Search Church"), complete with pews and an altar.

The motive: The way we came to this space was accidental, but so much of the time, you put people in a cube in an office park off 76 somewhere, and you expect them to be creative. There's an interesting disconnect between what companies say they want out of their employees, yet they don't put them in a place that can even begin to spark creative solutions.

The reward: It's become a rallying point. It allows us to put on events here, within the industry, especially. We try to be thought leaders, and that kind of visibility is great. We can also offer our space to different nonprofit groups for free, when they might have to pay for it somewhere else.



MARK MANDIA, president and COO, DMWDirect

The dig: environment: open space at light, which enables efficient team projects and collaboration — all in an advertising agency.

The motive: Our previous office was traditional in terms of many private offices and high workstations all in a dark environment. These barriers to workflow and communication.

The reward: A marked increase in efficiency of communication and collaboration agency more definitely has a new about it.



RICH MILGRAM, founder and CEO, Beyond.com, Inc.

The dig: The Beyond.com office cultivates an

open, creative, fun and smart environment. Low cubies, big windows and open spaces all stimulate discussion and unity.

The motive: When you provide a space that allows employees to spend time together and encourages them to get to know each other, not just as employees of the same organization but as friends, you have a happier work environment. It's much more enjoyable to work with people you call friends than to simply work with business colleagues.

The reward: While the team works hard, they also have the ability to step away from their desks when needed to de-stress for a bit. Members of our technology team are avid Wii bowlers, and we have a dry erase board that proudly displays the record holders for our Pop-A-Shot basketball hoops. I also partly



TRACY LEVESQUE, owner and web designer, Yikes, Inc.

The dig: Yikes removed a vacant

Fishtown building and is working toward a LEED Platinum certification.

The motive: As a company, we've founded on sustainability practices. We started in 1996, when there really wasn't the terminology there is now. We

form and function

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR OFFICE'S DESIGN



Pool tables, toys and bright colors are great, but you don't always have to go to such extreme lengths to create an innovative office that works for your company's and employees' needs. Rather than focusing solely on the form, it's important to think about how your office's design will function.

This is what Tonya Comer, principal at Tonya Comer Interiors, focuses on every day in her commercial interior design work. "What I still find missing in workspace design is the combination of multi-function spaces," she says. "I still am amazed at how often I walk into office spaces and see how little function or flexibility there is in their office area."

Comer believes multi-functional space is not necessarily a novel concept, but it is unconventional because it still isn't used nearly as much as it should be.

In the early 2000s, at the height of the technology boom, companies all over the world were creating new, funky workspaces that combined work and play in a unique way. Comer is seeing a marked decrease in this trend, but some companies are still managing to pull it off. "When it's done really well, it's fabulous," she says.

One of the biggest concerns about changes to the physical-office environment is the effect it will have on those working in it. The trend toward collaborative workspaces and removing barriers to management began in the late 1990s and is still going strong today. But there is a huge cultural obstacle to overcome.

"The corner office is still valued by," Comer says, and removing physical hierarchies within an organization can lead to a certain level of discomfort for management and employees alike.

Comer says the most important step is to get other people involved from different departments. The only way you can tell what the most effective office setup will be is to ask your employees. "Assess the needs by department, for the company morale, for productivity — make it as innovative as possible, predicting what could be in the future to address all these needs," Comer advises.

There is a direct correlation between workplace environment, business effectiveness and boosted morale of employees," Comer says. "It is certainly worth a CEO to look at their workspace to identify if, in fact, they can improve effectiveness and employee turnover through enhancements."

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