

The pandemic is changing how Jacksonville offices are configured

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PERDUE

Open and enclosed spaces are equally important in office designs in the pandemic era.

American office spaces were already changing in big ways before the pandemic began in 2020, but the coronavirus is spurring businesses to dramatically shift the way they envision — and use — their offices.

Vince McCormack and Justin Perez of Jacksonville commercial furniture provider Perdue are seeing these shifts firsthand.

They said rather than the pandemic slowing down the office furniture business, it has actually spurred more companies to make changes to their workspaces to keep employees safe and to give them a place they want to come and be productive.

“Workers want to come back to something different,” Perez said. Perez is director of account management and sales operations at Perdue.

McCormack and Perez said most projects they are working on these days involve a hybrid of physical office spaces as well as work-from-home spaces.

Gone are the days when a business would just buy new pieces of furniture or cubicles to refresh the office.

“It’s not just about furniture; now we’re looking at commercial office spaces and how technology is integrated,” Perez said.

It's a design principle known as "braiding the digital and the physical," one of four principles that are guiding what Perdue offers to customers. The principles are based on research from the brand Steelcase, which is offered by Perdue.

Perdue is helping clients find ways to install the technology seamlessly into office spaces so that at a press of a button a worker could make a Microsoft Teams or Zoom call without having to spend a lot of time connecting devices or troubleshooting.

McCormack said Perdue's office and showroom at 5 W. Forsyth St. in downtown Jacksonville was renovated last year and now shows off how open office concepts are morphing in this new era to include a range of spaces from cubicles to small call rooms to large open meeting spaces and everything in between.

McCormack said in general Perdue is seeing local businesses choosing to re-analyze and re-imagine how they use the space they already have rather than opting for a smaller footprint, although that does happen.

"Companies are needing spaces that can easily be repurposed and modified as needed," McCormack said.

Another trend Perez and McCormack noted is executive offices moving from the traditional "corner office" spot to a more centralized and accessible place in a floorplate. To address any privacy concerns this creates, Perdue offers glass walls that completely mask information on screen displays when looking in from outside.

As the pandemic continues, Perez said he thinks it is exciting to see how offices continue to change.

"We're seeing companies think through 'How do we make an intentional investment in our space that then drives dollars down the road?'" Perez said.

The pandemic has forced businesses to make these decisions with their spaces.

"It has been a catalyst for change," Perez said. "It's the difference between a 'want to have' and 'have to have.'"

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