

# How Today's Top Law Firms Design Office Space for Efficiency

Technological advancements and the recovering economy are indeed changing the needs of today's workforce as well as the need for improved efficiency in commercial office space. To date, much of the focus from experts has put a great emphasis on trends such as collaborative workstations and virtual office space. However, as Senior Vice President of a national real estate firm and leasing agent of the tallest office tower in Florida which is home to 415,000 square feet of law firm tenants (eight of those firms currently listed on the 2013 Am Law 200), I've noticed that top law firms are incorporating more modern, efficient designs geared towards costs savings and collaboration, taking a different approach than creative-focused companies.

With employees and clients in mind, law firms are navigating the delicate balance of blending efficient design and modernizing with elements that permit confidentiality for face-to-face client meetings. As a result, efficiency for law firms does not translate to the open work workstations that have become popular at other companies. Instead, it is exemplified in clustered conference rooms situated near the main lobby or entrance. By not having clients walk through the extended hallways of a law firm to get to a partner's corner office, firms can opt for more modest, cost effective office space.

Rather than open workstations and offices that are more popular in the creative sectors, law firms are not ready to tear down the walls altogether, as there are sensitive and private conversations to be had which cannot take place in an open room on high-top tables. Instead, more firms are incorporating glass for large windows and perimeter walls into office design which not only promotes connectivity but also offsets the impact of the overall shrinking of individual office space.

The generational gap within the modern workplace has impacted design planning as well. From the increased use of technology, to paperless filing to online law libraries, the structure of offices has shifted virtually. In many companies, this has led to the reduced need for support staff such as administrative assistants, downgrading the ratio that was once 3 lawyers to 1 assistant to about 7 to 1. Some of the larger firms are even centralizing support staff in a neutral, less metropolitan city to reduce the cost of having teams of such personnel at every location.

To offset the individualized working existence as a result of a more technologically advanced workplace, connectivity is essential. This is achieved through creating purposeful in-house amenities, such as in-house cafeterias, lounges complete with baristas and TV monitors, and Wi-Fi throughout to allow for movement.

While the office space needs of professional service firms are quite different from those of other businesses, law firms still aim to be on-trend for employees and clients as well as relevant in an ever-changing society. Some traditional elements specific to the highly professional nature of the law industry still remain the same, but changes including reducing staff in particular locations, making sure there is less non-usable square footage, and maximizing the use of space are major results of the economy that have led to the current design trends and emphasis toward more efficient law offices.

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