



Guide to Office Furniture

Introduction

Advances in technology and increased feature sets have made the process of selecting office furniture for your business a much more complicated and difficult task than it has ever been before. Your office furniture will be one of the **first things visitors notice** that helps to develop their perception of your company, so you want it to look as good as your budget will possibly allow.

Also your employees **rely on their office furniture** to support them in their daily tasks. By selecting good quality office furniture that looks good and fits ergonomically, you are promoting happier, healthier employees **who can do their jobs more efficiently**. That ultimately may translate into more profits for your business.

Office furniture comes in all shapes and sizes, for all different uses. Your options for office furniture range from inexpensive stacking chairs to systems furniture costing thousands of dollars. Should you select high-end ergonomic desks and chairs for your employees, or would systems furniture (cubicles) be a better option? Should you spring for a fancy, solid wood conference room table, or would a laminate model be a better way to go?

Some of these questions will be answered in part by the information gathered in your space plan, and from your employees. Others will be determined by **closely consulting with your office furniture provider**. This Guide to Office Furniture is designed to provide you with the information you need to help select the right office furniture provider for your business.

Types of Office Furniture

There are five basic types of office furniture. Obviously there is specialty furniture of every conceivable type, but for the purposes of this guide, we will be focusing on the following types:

- Office Chairs
- Office Desks
- Office Tables
- Filing Cabinets
- Systems Furniture (Cubicles)

Office Chairs



An office chair is something that most employees 40 hours a week occupying. The chair needs to fit the particular employee well, work correctly in conjunction with their desk, as well as look good in the overall scheme of the office. With all of those factors to consider, it is easy to see why shopping for the perfect one can be a difficult process.

Ergonomic Office Chairs

This is the most popular type of chair and is a lightweight rolling, swiveling desk chair with adjustments that allows a custom fit for the particular occupant. These chairs are designed for employees who spend most of their day sitting. Please see the chapter below for more information regarding ergonomic desk chairs.

Reception Office Chairs

Reception chairs are especially important if you are trying to make a good impression on your clients – again these are some of the things that are first seen by visitors. Also, if your clients are forced to wait for any period of time, you want them to be as comfortable as possible. These usually have fixed wheels and armrests

Conference Room Chairs

Conference room chairs can be difficult to select. Obviously you want each chair to be as comfortable as possible – after all, you will most likely have outside visitors in your conference room. However, these chairs are not typically used for a large portion of the day like other furniture, and must fit into the confines of your budget.

Folding and Stacking Chairs

While not typically suitable for work chairs for your employees, folding and stacking chairs can be useful in many situations – especially if you have a large multipurpose space or if you need mobile seating. Folding and stacking chairs are available in a variety of materials and styles, and can be a versatile and cost-effective solution

Ergonomic Office Chairs

Ergonomic chairs are designed to provide complete support and comfort to their users, whatever their task happens to be. They usually accomplish this through the incorporation of many adjustable parts into their design, which makes knowledge of the components helpful.



Back Supports

To prevent poor posture, ergonomic office chairs should provide a supportive element for the curvature of the office chair user's lower back. While some backrests can be adjusted to provide a custom fit, many do not have this ability. If you have particularly long or short legs, you may wish to check into the ergonomic office chairs that offer adjustable back support.

Seat Height

Ergonomic office chairs should be easily adjustable to prevent back pain and improve posture. Proper alignment dictates that both feet should be on the floor, and that the knees should be at 90° angles without touching the seat. You should also be able to type at the keyboard with your arms straight, putting no extra weight on your wrists

Seat

The seat of an ergonomic office chair should be wide enough to support a variety of users and deep enough to let users lean up against the supportive backrest. The chair should be approximately one inch wider than the user's thighs and hips on each side, for maximum comfort and support. Remember to keep in mind the variety of body types and sizes you have in your office when ordering ergonomic office chairs as you may need to purchase a few different models to accommodate everyone successfully.

Armrests

These are usually adjustable both vertically and horizontally which provides customized support for the wrists, neck, and shoulders—three very stress-prone areas in office employees. Padded armrests can provide even more support and comfort for certain workers, which may be a plus if your employees frequently type or use the computer.

Swivel Mechanism

Most ergonomic office chairs swivel to allow users to move easily from side to side, which minimizes strain when reaching. This can be especially beneficial to employees that frequently reach down to filing cabinets, or are twisting to answer phones.

Wheels

Many ergonomic office chairs are rolling, to provide easy access to things across the room or at the other side of large desks. You can often choose from sturdy wheels fit for carpet or textured floors, or rubber-tipped casters which are made to roll harmlessly over surfaces that are easily damaged.

Leather Office Chairs



There are two main types of leather, *split-grain* and *top-grain*. Leather taken from any of the lower surfaces of an animal are called split-grain leathers, and they are much less durable than top-grain leathers. Only the cheapest office chairs should be made of split-grain, and even then, you get what you pay for. Top-grain leathers are leathers taken from the outer surface of the hide, and are the most desirable. **All but the least expensive of office chairs are made of top-grain leather.** Since most office chairs are made of top-grain leather, we will focus on the ways top-grain leather is classified:

Aniline Leathers

Leathers which have been soaked in aniline dye but otherwise untreated. Aniline is reserved for the top-quality leathers, as the resulting product has to be buttery soft without additional treatment. This leather is great if office chair quality and feel are more important to you than durability and affordability.

Semi-aniline Leathers

Leathers with a small amount of surface or color treatment. These leathers are a bit more protected against fading and stains but are usually less soft. They can be waxed or corrected slightly, and are a good middle option if a softer feel is desired for your office chair, but not at the cost of durability or affordability.

Pigmented Leathers

Leathers that have been fully treated with surface dyes. Usually, pigmented leathers are lesser grade and much less soft, but they are more resistant to wear, in addition to being more affordable. Pigmented leathers can be embossed to create patterns, waxed, or colored for a variety of effects.

How to Select a Quality Office Chair

Function - You want to get the right chair for the right job. A plastic stackable chair wouldn't work well as the primary task chair for a programmer, but an ergonomic office chair wouldn't be able to function practically as a portable seat for an event either.

Comfort - If you are purchasing reception, task, or executive chairs, comfort is an all important consideration. What is comfortable for one person may not be comfortable for all people, but look for things like padding, adjustable arm rests, and adjustable seat height.

Appearance - Depending on what you use the chair for, appearance could be immensely important, or not important at all. If you would like a chair that fits in with your décor, make sure to have appropriate colors and finishes in mind to make shopping easier.

Price - Price is a factor that gets more important as you purchase more chairs. While one chair may not break your budget, if you consider purchasing that chair for 100 employees, you begin to see the importance of getting the best prices from quality providers.

Sitting is one activity that office workers do more than any other, often for eight or more hours a day. Keeping employees comfortable is vitally important, as an employee distracted by back, shoulder, or wrist pain isn't going to be at his or her most productive. Purchasing the right office chairs is a way to help ensure that your employees are healthy, pain-free, and able to perform the tasks related to their job as efficiently as possible.

Office Desks

Aside from office chairs, office desks are the most heavily used piece of furniture in your office. Employees use their desks all the time in an office environment as it houses computers, papers, and possessions. Desks are tailor-made for a variety of office tasks. For ergonomic reasons, its important to get the right desk for the right task.



Computer Desks

These desks are made for those whose primary task is computing. They often have an adjustable keyboard platform and adjustable legs so that the set-up and the height are completely customizable. For employees who often work on the computer, a computer desk is most likely your best choice.

L-Shaped Desks

This desk is shaped like an “L,” allowing for maximum space usage. Popular with receptionists and other office professionals who have multiple tasks such as typing, filing, etc., this is a great all-around office desk.

U-Shaped Desks

This is a desk shaped in a semi-circle to give its occupant plenty of workspace. Choosing between an L and a U-Shaped Desk is a matter of preference, as each is designed to give the occupant plenty of room to spread out while multitasking.

Receptionist’s Desks

Every aspect of a receptionist’s desk is designed with the public eye in mind as it is one of the first things that a possible client will see when walking into your office, and should look the part. Coming in a variety of shapes and sizes, these desks are designed to make your office look professional, successful, and inviting.

How to Select a Quality Office Desk

Function - If you are using your desk for a particular function, make sure that it works. For example, if you use the computer, make sure there is a place to put your keyboard, snake the wires down to the outlet, and adjust the tabletop height. If you need to fit filing cabinets underneath the desk, make sure it is the correct fit to accommodate your request.

Drawers - The drawers on higher quality desks will use sturdy metal suspension rollers, and have a smooth feel. They will also slide all the way out, without dropping to the floor, to allow the user to fill each drawer to full capacity. Wooden desk drawers should be constructed with dovetailed, or interlocking, seams instead of stapled or glued seams. Drawer bottoms should be heavy plywood or a wood veneer instead of particle board.

Surfaces - When looking at laminate desks, the type of laminate used is an indicator of both its quality and its durability. A thick, high-pressure laminate will weather watermarks, stains, and scrapes much better than its thinner counterpart. With laminate tables it is also important to look for rounded corners, as they are less intrusive in the workplace and don’t have the same vulnerability to cracking or peeling. Wood surfaces should be well finished and free of rough spots or splinters, which make the desk less attractive and functional.

Height - Most of the time employees at desks use a computer frequently—which is why the instance of computer-related injury is high in the workplace. The desk and chair need to be at the proper height to insure alignment of the hands and a reduced instance of injury. The standard office desk is 29 to 30 inches, and that height may cause discomfort if you regularly use your computer. Thus you may also wish to consider a height-adjustable office desk, or an office desk equipped with an adjustable keyboard platform.

Whichever option you chose, make sure that you have enough room for both your keyboard and mouse to fit comfortably and functionally. Many desks are equipped with holes for computer and other equipment wiring that allow all cables to be threaded down and out of the user’s way—improving the look and the function of the desk.

Other desks may have wire storage areas or channels that do essentially the same thing, just in a different way. Check to make sure you can organize your wires on the desk of your choice before committing to a particular office desk.

File Cabinets



Choosing a file cabinet for your office is more than just considering drawer counts and finish, it is about choosing the organization system that best fits your office from a functional as well as design standpoint. The right filing system will not only make it easier to keep all your office paperwork organized, but also may help to streamline the whole filing process.

Vertical File Cabinets

Also known as a traditional filing cabinet, the vertical filing cabinet has anywhere from 2-5 drawers per cabinet and allow papers and folders to be filed facing the front of the drawers. Because these take up less space along the wall, vertical filing cabinets are often the preferred choice for offices with limited wall space.

Lateral File Cabinets

These alternate choices are much wider than their traditional counterparts, which allows for files to be stored either side-to-side or front-to-back in drawers. They are less deep than traditionally build cabinets, which allow them to serve as wall partitions or occasional tables in the right office setting. They are also more versatile in terms of filing, as they can hold both legal and letter sized files unlike vertically designed cabinets.

The most important thing in selecting a filing cabinet is how it fits in with your office. Analyze your office space and determine what kind of wall availability you have. Then consider your filing practices and your method or system for organizing files. Let those answers dictate your initial choices, and then from the selection that meets that criteria, choose the one that best matches your office decor.

Office Tables

Office Tables come in all sorts of shapes and sizes—from small glass occasional tables to large wooden conference tables, and everything in between. Whether they are displayed in an entryway or finishing out a conference room, they are an important part of your office environment. There are many different kinds of office tables available, however there are two main types of office tables –

Conference and Boardroom Tables, and **Occasional Tables**.



Large, long tables used in a conference room are usually made of either wood or laminate. These range widely in size, depending on how many people you would like to accommodate with the table, and can be quite expensive. An **occasional table** could be an **end table**, a **side table**, a **coffee table**, or any other sort of **small office table**. Occasional tables come in a wide variety of materials and designs, are a great way to spruce up an office space without increasing your budget.

Conference Room Tables

Conference tables vary widely from office to office, depending on the size of the office, the frequency and type of meetings, and the desired look and feel of the conference room.

Boardroom Tables

Boardroom tables are what many people think of when they think of conference room tables: a large table with room for anywhere between 6 and 16 people. Boardroom tables come in many shapes, including the curved 'boat-top', the oval-shaped 'racetrack,' and the traditional rectangular. Boardroom tables are usually constructed of wood and wood veneers and are of good-quality workmanship.

Round Tables

Perfect for conference rooms with limited space, or for an extra meeting room, round tables facilitate a more up-close and personal discussion style. These are available in a multitude of finishes, but usually have solid bases and ship fully assembled for the sake of convenience.

Wooden Tables

If you want to make an excellent first impression on important office guests then wood tables are your best bet. While they are a bit more costly than your average laminate or veneer table, they are often much more durable, and are certainly the most classy of options.

Laminate Tables

Cost-conscious businesses may wish to look into laminate conference tables as they are the most cost-effective option. Great for writing, these tables usually feature a low-grade wood with a laminate coating of plastic on top to protect from nicks and scratches. Laminates can be color-coordinated to your office environment or patterned to look like wood in some cases.

How to Select a Quality Office and Conference Room Tables

Function - If you are using your table for a particular function, make sure that it is the right height, finish, length, and width in addition to seating as many people as required.

Drawers - The drawers on higher quality tables will use sturdy metal suspension rollers, and have a smooth feel. They will also slide all the way out, without dropping to the floor, to allow the user to fill each drawer to full capacity. Wooden table drawers should be constructed with dovetailed, or interlocking, seams instead of stapled or glued seams. Drawer bottoms should be heavy plywood or a wood veneer instead of particle board.

Surfaces - When looking at laminate tables, the type of laminate used is an indicator of both its quality and its durability. A thick, high-pressure laminate will weather watermarks, stains, and scrapes much better than its thinner counterpart. With laminate tables it is also important to look for rounded corners, as they are less intrusive in the workplace and don't have the same vulnerability to cracking or peeling. Wood surfaces should be well finished and free of rough spots or splinters, which make the desk less attractive and functional.

Systems Furniture



While cubicles are often touted as a downside to any office environment, they can be great space-saving solutions. With the variety of cubicle choices, you may be surprised at the ways they could help your office. Unlike purchasing most office furniture, buying cubicles isn't just about finding a design and a type that would look good with your décor. It is an involved process that requires you to work closely with your provider, as the different types and designs of system furniture available are practically limitless.

Perhaps the most important thing to know is the floor plan and measurements of the space you are going to outfit with systems furniture. These measurements don't have to be exact, as many systems furniture dealers will take more detailed measurements once you start the purchasing process. However, approximate dimensions will make it much easier to shop around and have initial conversations with systems furniture vendors.

Then consider the employees who will be working in these cubicles. What do they spend their days doing? Talking on the phone? Working on the computer? Collaborating with one another to brainstorm or problem solve? Depending on their job description, their ideal systems furniture configuration could vary widely.

Finally, you have to remember to think about how the office will be laid out. You wouldn't want an employee always interrupted by traffic going to and from the bathrooms, or a station that is constantly subjected to the noise of the shared printer. Remember, you don't have to finalize any one arrangement, but it is good to be aware of possible disruptions so that you can start to plan around them.

Systems Furniture Features

Cubicles can be suited to accomplish a number of tasks: block out noise, facilitate group work, or provide privacy. Ensure you meet your systems furniture objectives by choosing features that enable you to get the look and the function that you want.

Cubicle Walls

Cubicle walls come in a variety of heights and a variety of materials as well. In addition to the standard particleboard and metal units, cubicles can have windows. While these can be aesthetically pleasing, keep in mind that they make the cubicles less effective at blocking noise.

Power Sources

If your employees are going to use computers, phones, or any other electric device within their cubicle, they will need a power source. There are three main power options for systems furniture: Base-feed electricity, top-feed electricity or the "utility pole" approach. Both base-feed and top-feed electric options require that you electrify each cubicle, and can be rather pricey. If your configuration allows it, you may wish to go with the "utility poles" option, as it works with the structure you already have in place to provide power to your systems furniture.

Storage

Cubicles often have a variety of storage options to choose from, and there should be several that fit your cubicle requirements. They often include filing drawers, cabinets and shelves, wheeled pedestals, and freestanding shelves. Many systems furniture lines are set up to provide maximum opportunities for task customization.

Task-specific Accessories

For employees who frequently work on computers, there are often keyboard trays that adjust to a proper, ergonomic height. Some cubicle systems even offer entire work surfaces with adjustable height. You can often also get built-in bulletin boards, whiteboards, task lights, and hooks. Talk with your office furniture provider about the features you want, and how you can incorporate them into the system.

There are several common cubicle sizes: 6' x 6', 6' x 8', and 8' x 8'. However, cubicles can range from 2' x 4' for a call center workstation, to 12' x 12' for a manager's cube. In addition to the footprint of the cubicle, you need to determine the cubicle's wall height. This typically ranges from 34" to 85", depending on how much privacy your employees require. Many employees like to be able to talk easily with their co-workers while having privacy while sitting, and 54" walls are a great way to accomplish that.

How to Select Quality Systems Furniture

Tasks -Why are you purchasing systems furniture for your office? Do you have a group of telemarketing or telecommunications employees that need a small workstation? Are you attempting to promote team dynamics with a group arrangement? Do you want to provide a managerial office to a few employees for meetings and conferences? Always keep your requirements forefront in your mind, as they will strongly dictate the type of systems furniture you need to purchase.

Flexibility - Do you plan on moving offices in the next few years? Will you eventually need to rearrange the current workspace to accommodate more employees? Will you eventually need these cubicles to serve a different sort of worker? If so, you may want to choose a system that allows you to upgrade or rearrange to fit a variety of needs. There are systems available that can work for many different configurations, so be sure to let your office furniture dealer know about your need for flexibility.

Durability - Most systems furniture is made to last for many years, however to get a good estimate of how long you can expect a system to last, look at the warranty. And since cubicles and systems furniture are both long-term purchases, ensure that your dealer is committed to carrying and servicing the line that you're considering so that you can make the most of your office cubicles with the least amount of hassle.

Design - Each systems furniture manufacturer may have several lines of cubicles and systems furniture, and each may have a slightly different appearance. When choosing your cubicles, you should not only keep in mind what you need them for, but where they will be located. Will the cubicles be one of the first things a potential customer sees when walking into your office? If so, you may wish to consider the fabrics, finishes, and overall look of the systems furniture very carefully. However, if the cubicles won't be readily seen by outside visitors, consider choosing overstocked, refurbished, or slightly older models.

Price - When choosing your price range, it is important to not only keep your budget in mind, but the impact of your cubicle decision on your employees. While you may be able to save \$100 a cubicle by going with a particular model, it may not be the most effective choice for your employees. Always factor price in conjunction with other considerations.

Providers - Perhaps the most important component of the systems furniture purchasing process is the provider with whom you will be working. Most systems furniture and cubicle providers will create a layout of your office on the computer, and then work with that model to customize your cubicle arrangement to your feature requirements. The more informed your provider is about your systems furniture needs, the more they can put their considerable expertise and experience to work for your business.

How Affordable is Systems Furniture?

Many people purchasing systems furniture for the first time get a surprising case of sticker shock upon first looking at prices. When confronted with a number as low as \$700 or as high as \$5,000+, it can be difficult to remember that each cubicle will last for decades, and that the employee that occupies it uses it 40 hours or more per week.

The price of office cubicles is so variable not only due to the difference in styles, but also because of the large refurbished office cubicle market that exists. In fact, many dealers will carry full lines of both new and refurbished office furniture. In addition to that, companies will sometimes offer a discount for larger orders.

Most office furniture providers will give you a price estimate for the entire system, which is fine. However, you should be able to price out each individual option during the negotiations, and add and subtract costs as you add or subtract elements from your systems furniture design. The more clearly you can itemize, the better deal you'll get.

Delivery can also add a lot of additional cost to your order, as cubicles and other systems furniture can be very heavy. If you buy locally, you may be able to save a significant amount of money on shipping and handling charges. Regardless of where you get your cubicles, make sure that the delivery and installation costs are included in the total price estimate, and you know exactly what they are.

If your business doesn't have the available capital to purchase all the systems furniture you need, don't despair - you can lease systems furniture from providers as well. In addition to lower up-front costs, leasing office cubicles is considered an operating expense and is taken from pre-tax income instead of after-tax profit. Consult a financial advisor before making any large purchases, and ask them about the benefits and detriments of leasing versus purchasing for your particular business situation.

Recycled Office Furniture

Chances are you already recycle paper, aluminum, glass, and plastic in your home. Did you know that recycling office furniture can help you do your part for the environment, and save a significant amount of money as well? Recycled office furniture is any office furniture that has been used before, including refurbished office furniture and 'as-is' used office furniture. You can find recycled office furniture to meet every budget, as prices range from inexpensive, slightly irregular office furniture, to moderately priced top-of-the-line refurbished furniture.



Used Office Furniture

Used office furniture is usually sold 'as-is'. Because there has been no work done on it, it is often very inexpensive, and can be great if you don't mind cosmetic defects, or the occasional do-it-yourself repair.

Refurbished Office Furniture

Recycled office furniture that has been touched up or repaired by an office furniture vendor is known as refurbished office furniture. While still much cheaper than new office furniture, it is more expensive than used office furniture.

Remanufactured Office Furniture

Remanufactured office furniture is office furniture that has been disassembled, painted, repaired, and reassembled, so that it looks and feels like new. It is usually the most expensive of the recycled office furniture options, but it is still only a fraction of new office furniture price

Benefits to Purchasing Recycled Office Furniture

Quality - Used office furniture usually isn't discarded because it is broken and beyond repair. Most of the time, office furniture is discarded because it either doesn't fit the look or the function of the office that it is in. Most office furniture is sturdy and made for a lifetime of use, which is why the used and recycled office furniture market is so successful.

Cost - Recycled office furniture, whether it is refurbished, remanufactured, or 'as-is,' is always cheaper than new office furniture. If you don't care about having the most up-to-date fabrics, or chairs that all look exactly the same, then there shouldn't be any contest - used office furniture is the way to go.

Conscience - If you purchase recycled office furniture of any kind, you are reducing your use of the raw resources needed to build new office furniture, as well as landfill space. As an added benefit to lower cost, purchasing recycled office furniture helps the environment as well.

Note: A common misconception about recycled office furniture is that it looks tacky, which is far from the truth. While used office furniture may be available in limited designs, recycled furniture affords enough options to satisfy even the most particular customer. Usually, you can find used options that work for your office for a fraction of the price.

Conclusion

Your office furniture provider may be the most important buyer resource during your relocation process, and making sure you get the right one now will save you headache after headache later on. The right provider will take a service oriented approach to your purchasing request, and may offer you to get the best use of your space. Last, they should work with you to solve or eliminate any and all problems you have during the purchasing and installation process with your cubicles.

As you can see, selecting the right office furniture for your business requires the consideration of many different factors. We hope this guide has helped to inform you on the features and functionality available in office furniture today, which will ultimately help you to select the right office furniture provider for your company's requirements.

Note: This guide provides general guidance and should not be construed as specific financial, technological, insurance, legal, or accounting advice. Always consult a qualified advisor for specific guidance in these matters.