

# DOING MORE WITH LESS

A poor economic climate has put the squeeze on facilities budgets in recent years. With real estate representing a large share of a company's costs, this environment has given way to a trend of shrinking square footage. With this in mind, interior designer Lynn McGregor offers space planning tips on where to spend and what not to sacrifice

BY LYNN MCGREGOR

Interior designers are often asked about trends in office design and space planning. Typically, these trends fall into two very distinctly different directions.

The first direction is that of corporations that want to be seen as leaders in their communities, which is reinforced through their office space. These are the corporations that are happily adding more square footage to their facilities – more than they might need to – in a demonstration of confidence in their organization's future. They have a long-term perspective and see the value in doing things right today.

The other direction is the more common one and the more challenging one from a design and space-planning perspective. Inspired by the current unprecedented economic times, the objective of this group is to find greater efficiencies by 'getting more out of less.' (This refers to both square footage and office facility costs.) At first blush, it would seem that squeezing requirements into less square footage would ensure this, by simply reducing overhead costs, but those experienced with the design and management of offices know that the reality may well be a different story.

When looking to fit more into less space, beware of the cheapest possible approach, as it often results in problems that are extremely expensive to correct.

## MAINTAIN THE MINIMUMS

Certain minimums that carry long-term costs, both financial and non-financial, shouldn't be sacrificed in efforts to save space.

Building Code-defined minimums, including fire hose coverage, fire exit routes and minimum distances to exits, are minimum safety standards. If a company is caught compromising them, the penalty of shutting down operations will not be worth it.

Spaces also send a message to staff, clients, investors and other visitors to an organization's office. The wrong message could cost a company dearly in the long run. And if functional adjacencies are compromised, efficiency and



productivity will go down as quickly as the staff's morale. This will definitely cost more than just money.

Finally, a space should have flexibility and be designed to respond to a surprise future need. This will support organizations in meeting another minimum: the ability to incorporate Ontario's new accessibility standards, due out in 2014. These new standards will be mandatory for all offices in the future and need to be considered. Tightly planned offices will have problems accommodating the new standards, but creative space planning will definitely offset the amount of extra space required. For more information on these upcoming changes, visit either [www.mcgregordesigngroup.com](http://www.mcgregordesigngroup.com), for a sneak peek, or the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing website, at [www.mah.gov.on.ca](http://www.mah.gov.on.ca).

## MAXIMIZE SQUARE FOOTAGE

Rather than compromising the quality of office space and the message it sends, consider implementing the following measures to get more mileage from square footage:

Increase the use of electronic filing and off-site storage, where possible, to reduce the need for on-site storage. When more storage is required, using high-density storage systems helps get more into space without increasing the size of the storage area. Just remember that high-density systems need to be located in areas that will structurally support them – not all areas of a typical office floor are appropriate. Utilize vertical space for storage, in strategically placed towers, to allow workstations and offices to have a lean footprint while enjoying the flow of daylight and fresh air. Strive for a better quality of space, not just a smaller space.

Do an audit of current office space to establish if areas

provided are really used, and if they're not, establish why. Decide if the areas are really needed anymore, or if they need to be corrected in some way. For example, if a lunchroom is not being used by staff who tend to go out for lunch, is it because the room is just so unpleasant that no one enjoys it, or do people really prefer to go out? The space could possibly be put to better use. Implement more multi-purpose areas to ensure that no office space lies fallow for long. Every office operation is unique, so evaluate an organization's specific office to discover its specific opportunities.

Office space standards should be reviewed to ensure that they are still pertinent in today's marketplace and still competitive with the competition. It helps a business' recruitment efforts if the work environment it's offering is competitive. But don't downsize workstation and office sizes to match the competition unless it can be ensured that the staff's functional and privacy requirements will still be met. There are indeed creative ways to do this. If staff know they are valued by their employer, they tend to be more loyal to their employer. It's never worth compromising on this one.

#### SPEND WHERE IT COUNTS

This current trend also asks facility managers to produce more for fewer budget dollars. Always protect the areas of spending that provide long-term support, value and functionality, and trim spending on the more transient areas, as they can be upgraded later if the desire is there.

For example, paint the walls in a new facility instead of

installing a more expensive wallcovering (even though it would provide more durability). That wallpaper can always be installed later (through an operations budget), when it's time for re-painting, to reduce the cost of future wall maintenance. But the quality of doors and frames chosen from the beginning will likely not be replaced later (or at least not without a heavy financial consequence).

Go with a quality the organization will be proud to live with for a good long while. From a furniture perspective, it's wise to reduce the amount invested in 'dead surfaces,' such as console tables and desk tops, but don't cheapen up the quality of the task chairs, as it's important not to compromise critical ergonomic support for staff.

#### LONG TERM, VALUE TRUMPS COST

Having a long-term perspective and an objective of 'good value' instead of 'lowest possible cost' for all areas of office facility spending will ensure a facility manager provides his or her organization with real long-term value for whatever investment level it's prepared to make in an office's facilities. | **CFM&D**

Lynn McGregor is a past president of ARIDO (the Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario), co-chair of its legislative review committee and elected representative of the province's Registered Interior Designers on Ontario's Building Advisory Council. She has practiced in the area of corporate architectural interior design for more than 34 years, and is the owner of the McGregor Design Group, headquartered in Toronto ([www.mcgregordesigngroup.com](http://www.mcgregordesigngroup.com)).

**GREENFERD CONSTRUCTION**

**carbonzero**  
GREEN

Greenferd is working to reduce our carbon footprint. We have partnered with Carbonzero to achieve carbon neutrality for our corporate operations.

**The Green Choice**

Tel: 905 743-4200  
Fax: 905 743-4704

70 East Beaver Creek Road, Unit 42  
Richmond Hill, ON L4B 3R2

**PROFESSIONAL. QUALITY. SERVICE.**

For more information go to our website [www.greenferd.com](http://www.greenferd.com) or call Sam Smith at 416 503 1612 | email [st@greenferd.com](mailto:st@greenferd.com)