

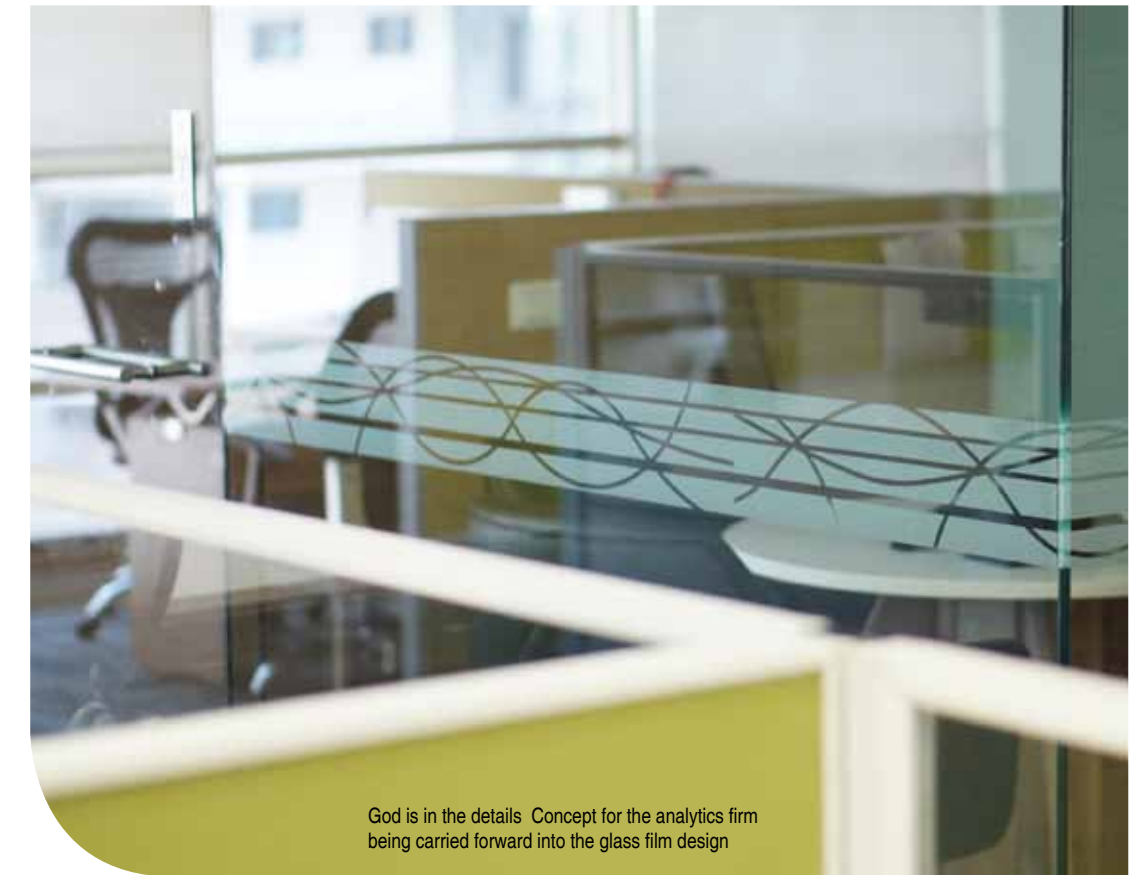
Shrinking Office Spaces



Corporations are electing to do away with the traditional workplace concepts of walled-in offices and rows of oversized, high-paneled cubicles. Taking their place are open floor plans, multi-functional workstations and plenty of communal space for employee interaction. And, the trend is here to stay says, *Anshuman Bhargava, Director & Creative Head at Blue Leaves Design, a New Delhi based Interior Design Consultancy firm.*



A massive typical workstation oriented office being broken up by a cutting edge informal library breakout area theme



God is in the details Concept for the analytics firm being carried forward into the glass film design

In the current economic climate of recession and slow growth 'Big' does not matter. Big becomes unaffordable, difficult to maintain and indicates less transparency. A new way to work is emerging. Small is the new big. Small represents niche, customized and personalized service to the customer. Multipurpose is the name of the game and the challenge for designers is to make the most out of every square inch of real estate.

Undeniably, the greatest influence on modern office design is technology. The growing prevalence of Smartphones, virtual conferencing, and virtual private networks (VPNs) means employees can work from anywhere, anytime and are less 'table bound'. We have smaller devices for everything. We have TFT screens instead of chunky CRT monitors and laptops instead of PCs. Because of this, the footprint of a workstation is getting smaller. An 8'x8' workstation is 7'x7' now.

There is a new realization that we work better in teams. So we need better collaboration spaces. Smaller workstations with shorter panels combined with more communal spaces are leading the way for increased communication in the office. This means, office design now dictates not only the kind of spaces where we work but also how we work.



Bright colours enliven a typical large MNC corporate office layout



Unitech – Collage Marketing office, Bhopal Off-beat Amusement park inspired interior design theme. Hence the multi-coloured graphic elements.

Design Implications

- Since the workspace footprint has reduced, modern corporate offices have smaller workstations, lesser guest seating and common meeting rooms.
- Since executives are less table-bound and many travel, they have shared ownership of private cabins.
- For more transparency and interaction, lower partitions use more glass and open up the work area.
- One size does not fit all. Some need more space to work. Like engineer working on a project who is in office more than 60 percent of the day will get a bigger workstation than the salesperson who is in office for less time.
- After arriving into the office, employees first check their mails (touchdowns). After that its teamwork throughout. Create touchdown zones or work desk, large common spaces and smaller private enclaves for occasional meeting.
- Large workstations and cabins are now replaced by bigger and better activity areas like a library, a resource centre, maybe a café and a lounge. More leisure breakout promotes office socialization, encourages collaboration as well as employee retention.
- Conference rooms are now in the middle of the workstations to make visitors feel the office culture. Divisible configurable spaces such as two smaller meeting rooms combining to form a larger conference room. Likewise pedestal tables are being combined into smaller meeting tables for employees.

- Multipurpose functional spaces display storage units as partitions and reception waiting areas doubling up as meeting rooms.

Sustainability is another big contributor to the trend of small corporate offices. Open plan office with less walls & partitions allows more natural light to permeate through the space, resulting in decreased need for artificial lighting. What's more, employees are more comfortable and productive with the presence of natural light. New office design is also utilizing glass and lots of reflective materials to increase overall illumination for increased energy-efficiency.

Technology is being used to maximum advantage for sustainability. For example, glass that turns opaque at the switch of a button, workstations with changeable heights, conference tables with concealed computer stations and energy saving laptops rather than desktop computers. Other design features include dimmable lighting, use of mirror optic lighting fixtures, LEDs, energy star rated air-conditioners and intelligent building management systems for lighting, air-conditioning, security etc.

To sum up, small offices need to work smart. They have to be energy efficient, flexible in design, reconfigurable and easy to maintain. The contemporary office design strives to optimize space yet convey the brand culture and be personal at the same time. One way is to use colour boldly. A monochromatic colour scheme in sync with the company brand makes the space look bigger. Play with surface textures but maintain the continuity and convey the legacy of the company. Though small in size, offices should enhance employee and visitor experience.

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