

## Lead the Way On Hybridity: Offering the Fittings and Flexibility the Office Market Wants



In commercial property news, if there is one word that dominates the talk of the office sector recovery stories these days it's "hybrid". The remote work 'revolution' remains a big deal, but its sticking power is anyone's guess. Is the world of work fundamentally changed? Or is this just a trend? The answer is not simple or singular, and it often depends on the industries or regions you're looking at. Here are three trends to consider:

### Remote Conferencing Tools

For new build or re-fitted spaces, it seems clear that anything that can be done to promote hybrid styles of work are welcome interventions. This entails accommodating employees in the office and those connecting to the office from remote locations. Meeting rooms equipped with a solid suite of contemporary video-conferencing tools will be the default.

The good news on this point is that video-conferencing no longer requires expensive, bespoke hardware. Even the free or "freemium" versions of cloud tools like Zoom, Teams, Google Meets and other conferencing software is leagues ahead of video-conferencing from a few years ago.

A starter solution is mounting big screens to the walls, with HDMI input cables so you can simply plug in a laptop for screen mirroring. The laptop's speakers and mic often suffice for small rooms. For larger rooms, you may want an omni-directional mic and external speakers, but the days of large custom build-outs may be gone or at least under serious pressure from "as-a-service" style providers.

What's important now is flexibility – that the tenant's preferred tool can be accommodated in the meeting rooms.

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## Flexi Furniture and Interior Design

Companies that offer their workforce flexible time options will have varying demand for desks, chairs, and workspaces that are multipurpose; modular and flexi furniture makers are looking to step in and fill the gap. We've already seen collaborations between modular furniture makers and flexi workspace brands, and there are interior design options – like stacking doors, and dividing walls on casters – that can be used to make quick smart changes.

Although this kind of design is still quite niche, we can expect it to grow – and, with that, for prices to come down while new forms hit the market. We can also expect to see creativity in building designs and more purpose-built pockets within buildings, like project rooms, “outdoor rooms” and other spaces geared for “activity-based working”.

## New Leases and Legal

Finally, it is worth adding that for the clever and contemporary CRE professional, we can't just approach this from a fittings and furniture perspective. That is one aspect of what we enable, yes, but we are also hearing from our networks and representatives in major markets around the world that the key to keeping office business ticking over these days is responsive and adaptable contracting – and we will be the ones bridging the gaps between occupiers and developers, between tenants and landlords.

Options like “state of emergency” or force majeure clauses are already relatively common and increasingly in demand in markets like New York City where we see pressure to allow for future pandemic-esque events that may interrupt business.

With the right amenities and thoughtful design, office spaces can be welcoming and healthy refuges, even in uncertain times, shifting the thinking – as Sandy Speicher of IDEO recently told the Harvard Business Review – to a “reason to come in, rather than regulation to come in”.

