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RESEARCH

Optimism and Confidence are Key Themes in 2022 Predictions from Industry Experts

AFTER REACHING OUT TO COMPANIES FOR THEIR 2022 PREDICTIONS, THE TEAM HERE AT BELLOW PRESS WAS PLEASANTLY SURPRISED BY THE POSITIVE OUTLOOK AND BRIGHT IDEAS THEIR RESPONSES OFFERED.

by Emily Clingman

We're still “unsure what the future holds,” but the office furniture and workplace design sectors seem to be bouncing back. It's probably safe to add optimism and excitement to the buzzword list.

From flexibility and safety to better acoustics and affordable price points, maturity and prosperity to hierarchy shifts and mental health, as well as metaverse development, experts weighed in from all angles with their predictions on the workplace of the future. No crystal ball needed here. The following 2022 industry predictions seem pretty solid to us. Cheers to “moving forward” and a fantastic new year for all!

Safety and sanitization

“I believe that 2022 will certainly bring about more attention to safety in the workplace. But as the new hybrid work environment significantly increases the number of shared workstations, we see considerable attention being placed on the sanitation of the primary work area in those shared stations, specifically input devices such as the keyboard and mouse. We see the office furniture industry as being a key provider of workstation products that address the sanitization of the stations, such as ultraviolet lighting products focused more on the individual desks that will become integral to workstation specifications moving forward. Additionally, the increase in shared workstations will put more emphasis on the need for universal solutions in workstations. The office furniture industry will likely introduce more technology products into office furniture specifications, such as docking stations, to help each workstation support the computer-related needs of all the employees who will use them.”

— *Jared Abramowitz, principal, ZGO Technologies*

Hard work and prosperity

“The industry will continue to struggle but I feel comfortable that AIS will continue to prosper.”

— *Bruce Platzman, CEO, AIS*

“My prediction is that no prediction is going to be very accurate. Work hard, deliver value, be honest, flexible and creative. That’s my plan.”

— *Bill Stewich, executive vice president, product development and engineering, AIS*

Maturity of perks

“Office perks will grow up. Move over ball pits and beer-on-tap. We’re seeing a maturing of the perks offered to employees — firstly because perks are now less tied to the physical office and secondly, priorities have shifted during the pandemic. A re-evaluation of our health and well-being has caused companies to switch up their offerings to reflect this, including insurances and health benefits, from gym memberships to meditation classes.

“Employees become clients of the workplace. With an extremely tight labor market, the war for talent is well and truly back. Companies that win in 2022 are those who’ll embrace flexibility and choice, providing an enriching experience in the workplace.”

— *Amanda Jay, workplace strategist, Spacestor*

Focus on health

“I think we will see the focus amplify on three key invisibles — sound, air quality and mental health. Sustainability requirements from customers will grow exponentially. Flexibility will become more important leading to greater mobility as well as more furniture rental and re-use. Flex office and coworking will see the



Fractals by Nook

greatest real estate growth. Longer term, I predict health professionals will join the workspace team.”

— David O’Coimin, founder and CEO, Nook

Hybrid style

“2022 will usher in an influx of office workers returning to the office to what they describe as the hybrid approach. They will all surely have smiles on their faces, happy to be with others shoulder to shoulder. In Canada, we won’t be able to see the smiles as we will still be wearing masks. Now realistically, we are witnessing strong quoting activity over the last two quarters and even better POs are returning to our inboxes, so we anticipate a very good year in 2022. Hang on, the fun’s just starting.”

— Dean McIntyre, president, Ayrsonics

Authenticity, flexibility and optimism

“Change is inevitable, whether slow and steady or as sudden as a cloudburst. All of human society has just experienced an enormous structural change in a very short time. As we consider what the new post-pandemic workplace will look and feel like, we need to be ‘future smart.’ At Teknion, we aim to be future smart by providing



Privacy on Demand, "POD" by Teknion

products for a future fit office that remains proof against change. We believe that people will continue moving down a path forward with informed optimism. Employees will seek more authentic experiences of coming together in the office to collaborate and forge bonds, working side by side to achieve individual and collective goals.

“Throughout 2020, people became accustomed to flexible work hours, an occasional or non-existent commute and the ability to self-manage in the home environment. Yet data supports the premise that most workers want to return to the office — a safe, secure office — for perhaps three or four days a week. Assuming office occupancy will stabilize post-vaccine at about 60-70%, a well-designed workplace will deploy furniture, space and high-and low-tech tools to support 100% participation however employees are distributed across space and time.

“Teknion’s latest product launches, including the Routes collection, Bene Box, and Privacy on Demand POD, exemplify qualities of the future fit office. Routes is designed to allow teams to create flexible, utility-driven, and engaging workspaces quickly and efficiently. Bene Box is a modular system that can be arranged and rearranged to suit any context. As employees shift between in-person and at-home work, flexible, privacy furniture, allowing users to create their own personal environment such as the POD product will play a large role in the look of tomorrow’s office spaces.

— *Steve Delfino, vice president of corporate marketing and product management, Teknion*

Quiet relief

“The workplace of the future is evolving, and the designated workstation may be a thing of the past. We are finding that more workplaces are becoming more collaborative, and that hybrid work is the way of the future. More heads-down work will mostly be done at home and collaborative social spaces are going to be the norm of an office. However, when someone is in between meetings, and they need that 30 minutes to work through email or a spreadsheet, they will need a place to go to have that quiet moment of relief from the noise of the new office. Temporary workstations or pods give that relief by offering the needs of the user with power ports, bag storage and noise dampening to give privacy and tools for a person to have that same quiet space they get from home. Products that promote the ability of workspace but are not a designated desk will be more important than ever.”

— Dan Winer, director of marketing and supply chain, Studio TK

Shared space, residential influences, emerging metaverse

“When it comes to workplace trends for the New Year, we anticipate three major themes. As many of our clients embrace the hybrid model, they have begun to rethink how much office space is needed and add more shared and collaborative areas. The second idea involves the proper use of furniture — it’s all about mobility and flexibility on a human scale. Furniture arrangements must be easily interchangeable by end-users. For example, employees can create a grouping for a meeting, a lounge area or even an individual workplace by moving around partitions and acoustic panels. The last big theme will include the human-centric approach and the focus on wellness. As designers, we must consider how people feel within the space and create a destination, not an obligation. As a result, we will continue to implement fresh, bold color palettes and make use of outdoor spaces wherever possible. We will also integrate residential design elements to attract those who are used to working from home and create an elevated level of comfort.

“For the workplace to coexist with work-from-home lifestyles, we must consider how to approach the hybrid model. Technology is a great equalizer; it has allowed us to work remotely and will provide tools that link colleagues together regardless of their location. Now, there is still a gap in the market for products that create seamless equity of presence and allow for those in the room and online to have an equal presence.

“Amenities have always been sought after in the workplace, but in 2022 amenities that support collaboration will be a priority. However, with the prevalence of video calls, we must also consider the need for multi-functional spaces and provide employees with a place to escape the noise of the office like a phone booth or private office. Because of the flexibility of these spaces, they become a design opportunity to create a more welcoming space with adjustable lighting and the necessary acoustical needs.

“We anticipate the prevalence of the metaverse in 2022. Today, we are working with the rudimentary metaverse and are meeting in a virtual space, which provides



Simple Baffle by Kirei

many benefits. Previously when gathering for a meeting, it would be more difficult to reference external documents or tools. Now, while we are all neutral logging in as remote participants, we can bring the topic of discussion to the screen and easily focus on it and co-create. The shift to virtual and introduction of several new online collaboration platforms, is beneficial in the way that everything has become faster. We are marking up documents in real-time, and after a meeting with employees, a product is ready to be shared.”

— *Danijel Pocanic, regional design leader, NELSON Worldwide*

Phone booths and amenity shifts

“Many of our clients are making the transition to unassigned seating in the office, with greater use of phone booths or semi-private rooms to provide team members with flexibility and choice. As the nature of business has changed since COVID, with more and more meetings being conducted virtually, there will be a need for office design that supports conference calls. Sophisticated, integrated technology will be introduced to accommodate a shifting hybrid workforce.

“I think the new role of the office is about being a hub for company culture and for collaboration, dressed in the visual identity of the organization. An office serves as a representation of a brand’s identity and a space that communicates values and mission while creating meaningful experiences.

“We are already seeing a shift in the hierarchy of amenities occupiers seek when choosing a new building or renovating their space. Demand for flexible, tech-connected private outdoor options will increase: The ability to go outside makes people not only feel safer in group meetings and individual work for those without enclosed offices, but also strikes all the notes for biophilia-related outcomes for health, well-being, productivity, and, of course, sustainable use of resources. The workplace of 2022 will focus on creating more points of physically distanced and virtually connected spaces, indoor and out to respond to the physical, social and emotional needs of the workforce of tomorrow.”

— Jodi Williams, principal, Washington D.C. office lead, CRTKL

Hospitality influence and acoustics

“The companies that will be successful in 2022 and beyond are now focused on how to make their workplaces not only functional but also a pleasure to spend time in. We are seeing a massive influence of hospitality into workplaces as their role is not only to be conducive to work, but also to attract people to come back to the office. Acoustics will play an even bigger role as companies redesign their offices to have the quiet and cozy feeling of the home offices we spent the last two years in and facilitate better hybrid work scenarios. No company wants to have the echoey room on a Zoom call. We all know we can do better than that.”

— Michael DiTullo, creative director, Kirei

Affordable ergonomics

“When people started working from home, they suddenly needed to create a home office. We found that many of these people were buying their own chairs based on style and price point, not ergonomics, and are now looking for something more long-term. In addition, companies now need to budget for providing office equipment in both the home and the office — so an affordable price point for office furniture is more important than ever before. We created our newest product, Eighty Two, to blend effortlessly into any home or office with a low price point coupled with the myriad of ergonomic features such as a headrest, arm options and seat slider. Companies will be able to revamp their office space or provide a work-from-home option for their employees, all while staying within budget.”

— Paul Vendittelli, president, Allseating

Dynamic environment

“By directly working alongside colleagues, offices promote the inspiring and collaborative spirit companies and employees crave that’s hard to replicate when working from home. That’s why one of the primary challenges workplace designers



Routes Collection by Teknion

are currently facing is maintaining that dynamic environment while balancing employees' increased demand for privacy and space. Individual six-foot desks are emerging as the standard again as firms are moving away from packing their staff into bench-style seating. Also, we are implementing more physical barriers like glass partitions in addition to privacy panels made from materials like felt, metal mesh and glass.

“With more meetings occurring via video conferencing, and in turn via noisy speakers and people talking loudly through microphones, employees are also becoming more concerned with acoustic privacy. That’s why we’ve been installing more booth-style pods and Zoom/webcasting type conference and meeting rooms to provide team members with an optimized environment to conduct meetings that mitigate distractions for participants and their surrounding colleagues while providing optimal acoustics and flattering lighting conditions.”

— Jennifer Adams, senior design director, Ted Moudis Associates

Fresh air, natural light

“The office environment is changing more than ever these days as businesses are navigating the disruption that COVID-19 left in the workplace. Maintaining a

healthy work environment will be important for getting people to stay at the office, both to put employees' minds at ease and to encourage productivity. These can include providing easy access to daylight, using nontoxic materials, upgrading the mechanical systems to allow for more fresh air exchanges and greater particulate filtration and including biophilic elements to lighten the mood. People also welcome the interaction of being back at the office after having been on their own for the last year and a half. In person, employees can use specifically tailored work zones, among the variety of other office spaces, to regulate how much they are interacting with others. These environments range from moveable, rearrangeable desks for teams to cafe seating where one can grab a snack and check a proposal. Team rooms are also opposing traditional conference tables in favor of comfortable furniture where folks can settle into their projects."

— *Jeff Juip, associate principal, Commercial Environments, MHTN Architects*

Adaptive design

"I believe that furniture will play an increasingly important role in defining workspaces in 2022. Creating spatial settings with furniture allows for enhanced flexibility, enabling companies to readily adapt and modify work setting layouts to meet changing business needs without major renovation or business disruption. Further, the coming year offers an exciting opportunity for office manufacturers to develop innovative solutions for dividing open office space, providing storage and meeting the changing needs of the hybrid workplace."

— *John Campbell, president, FCA*

Connection and culture

"The hybrid model is popular and is most likely here to stay. However, whether a person is required to go into the office five days a week will ultimately be dependent on their industry or job function. As comfortable as work-from-home or working remotely can be, it can't replace the magic of an in-office setting. The feeling of being connected to your coworkers, your company culture, the adrenaline and inspiration derived from collaboration and, of course, the increase in productivity. There are simply some things that just can't be done as efficiently or effectively without personal interaction. As more people return to the workplace and feel those benefits, we will see a higher demand to redesign these spaces for the post-pandemic workforce and the Gen-Z post-grads.

"Inscape sources its materials locally so we have not been hit hard by the disruption in the supply chain. Our lead times are still the standard six to eight weeks. We have been hard at work this past year focusing on product development, and we are excited to unveil new collections and storage in 2022 and 2023."

— *Laura Barski, vice president of marketing and product development, Inscape BoF*