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# 7 HOT TECH TRENDS FOR OFFICE TRANSFORMATION

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How companies are modernizing their offices through technology to optimize the work environment

Technology impacts every aspect of our daily lives, especially new construction. Learn more about the top seven tech trends hitting the Future Offices Market. Over the next 9 pages, we'll unpack everything from open space floorplans to IoT and discuss why it's imperative for your office to jump on the tech train.

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# 1. LAYOUT TO PLAYOUT

Probably the most prevalent office trend hitting the market is an open space floor plan. As younger generations filter in, the move toward an individual contributor economy (i.e. using the office as a place to periodically check in rather than as a home base) is stronger than ever.

The name of the game is therefore flexibility. Office layouts must be flexible enough to meet the needs of everyone and anyone (and at any given time) who works there. [Airbnb's](#) Oregon headquarters support this concept; their 'belong anywhere' motto reinforces the people-on-the-move mentality, in both their business plan as well as in their workspace mentality.

An open space floor plan simultaneously incorporates multiple elements of technology. This includes power access for employees' devices, no matter their chosen location; collaborative workspaces (think larger conference areas with accessibility); and smart technology to support productivity and employee engagement.



**Airbnb's Oregon Headquarters**



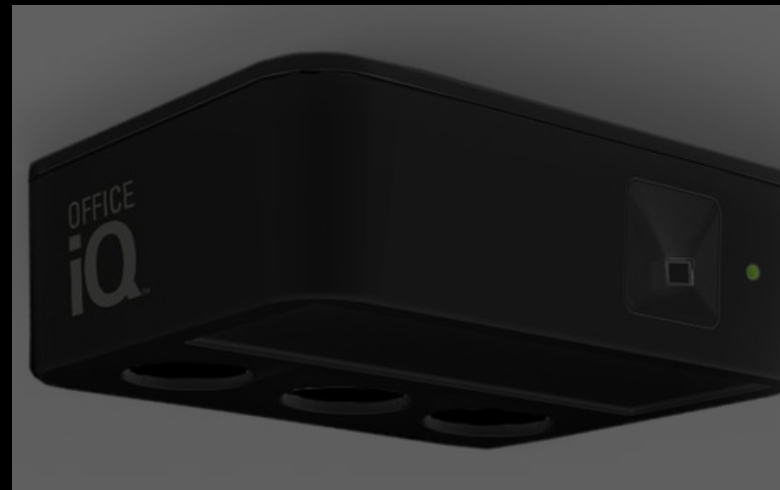
# 2. Let's Confer

As remote working becomes more commonplace, video teleconferencing is more important than ever. Proper technology to support productive meetings is essential for newly-built conference rooms in new offices. Conference rooms equipped with interactive whiteboards offer the ability to recall notes and information from previous meetings. [Microsoft's SurfaceHub](#) is already leading the pack in this race, and has partnered with Steelcase to design rooms to support multiple teams tuning into these shared whiteboarding sessions.



# 3. Working Smarter, Not Harder

Smart technology is already an undeniable part of all of our lives, but as office infrastructure continues to evolve so will the smart systems that support them. Sensors to indicate which employees are in certain conference rooms save time as well as maintain accountability. Offerings like Amazon's [Alexa for Business](#) simplify multitasking efforts through voice controls. These features will also streamline IT requests, conference calls, and office management work, allowing employees to do what they set out to: work. Increased data collection and analysis of employees' overall wellbeing through smart technology will enhance the focus on worker engagement and productivity. For example, innovative groundbreaker Humanscale has already developed furniture with sensor technology to alert employees when they've been sitting for too long. This is just one of the many ways smart technology will transform the offices of tomorrow.



HumanScale Office IQ

# 4. Light the Way

Here again, sensors will play a key role in improving employee engagement and satisfaction in the workplace. Major trends in lighting include focusing on natural light, with more windows and skylights and fewer light fixtures. Additionally, senior associate for IA Interior Architects Ann Marie Krol, NCIDQ, LEED AP ID+C, cautions against overlighting workspaces, as this can be wasteful and unproductive. She says the way to combat unnecessary energy use is with even illumination in the open office design. Instead of simply focusing on illuminating the spaces where we think employees work (i.e. desks), even illumination will support the nontraditional workstyle environment. This is particularly important as employees shift away from designated seat-desk areas and move toward undesignated workspaces, which could include lounging areas and communal workstations. Closed spaces such as conference rooms will likely still have overhead lighting, but dimming features will be smart-device accessible and controlled by users.



## 5. Sound Investments

What should the office look like is important, yes, but what about what the office should sound like? With the open plan concept, a valid concern is acoustics- won't the noise become overwhelming if everyone is collaborating at once? While using headphones for music or white noise is a great way to block out external noise pollution, it's not a sustainable solution. Carpet may be the most absorbent flooring material to quiet the chatter, but it is often not the most attractive or trendy option. Manufacturers like Interface, Tandus Centiva, and Mannington offer floor coverings to lessen the noise while maintaining the sleek aesthetic.

Angles also play a major role in acoustics; incorporating angular ceilings and wall surfaces can help control echoes. Additionally, variety is key. Varying reflective/hard surfaces of drywall partitions, as well as incorporating a variety of materials throughout the office will allow more sound to be absorbed.

Topping it all off are the ceilings. Free hanging unites (FHUs) made out of industrial-looking material like pre-drilled hardwood or perforated metal are all the rage. These floaters may seem very Jetsons-esque, but when placed strategically around the office, these sound-deadening panels not only control office noise, but they also add a unique aesthetic to the office space



# 6. Sustainable Living

Not surprisingly, renewable energy sources like solar and/or wind energy are popping up all over the office design world. [TechRepublic](#) quoted Kathy Gerwig, VP of employee safety, health, and wellness of Kaiser Permanente in saying it is truly feasible for organizations of any size can make the switch to solar and/or wind energy. Businesses located in deregulated electricity states (see [here](#) for a map) will have it even easier to choose green energy plans. Still, almost every electricity supplier offers wind or solar options. While costs may be incrementally more than traditional electricity plans using coal or natural gas, the prices are competitive, and the long term benefits outweigh the costs.

Apple Park, 100% powered by renewable energy





# 7. Sit With It

Now that the office is laid out and the infrastructure is in tact, we're done, right? Not quite.

Furniture as technology is the final piece that pulls this puzzle together. Furniture design incorporates all of the aforementioned trends (smart tech, sustainability, intergenerational workforce, collaborative and collective working) into one cohesive unit to produce the offices in which we work. Future office furniture takes into consideration the open space floor plan, and implements seating, workspace structures, and accessories (power strips, end tables, etc.) accordingly. Productivity is the end goal, but how we get there is changing. Activity Based Working (ABW) is the latest design strategy for combining open, private, team, and breakout workspaces. ABW supports the shift away from designated desks into a more open, collaborative environment.

Other foci include an emphasis on ergonomically-friendly furniture, as well as recycled desks and eco-friendly carpets. These small changes add up to a major shift in employee engagement and wellbeing. The end result is a more efficient and productive workforce which is something we can all get on board with.



Steelcase

# Why It Matters

The bottom line, of course, is why it matters. A shared Dell-Intel study showed that 80% of Millennials say office technology and agility impacts their decision when evaluating a new job. Microsoft recently released a study on company culture, and the way the digital sphere impacts it. Its findings were not terribly surprising: the higher the digital culture of a company, the better employee productivity, innovation, and overall employee engagement. Engagement or flow (the ability for workers to focus on tasks at hand and efficiently deliver end results) improved when companies were more adaptable to current trends. Matt Cain a VP at Gartner says, 'Humans will [always] be at the center of work, even as intelligent software and machines become our co-workers.' Our job now is to use new technology to optimize employees, and support them as they do the work technology cannot.