

an office to suit

By Graham Ormsby

As an architect with over 30 years experience of running my own practice, I have had the opportunity of exploring a number of work environment options. Let me share some of these options for your consideration.

Your well being is impacted by your environment – which impacts directly on the success of your business.



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To see if I could make a go at running my own design practice, the home study was converted to “the office”. Clients met in my garden or dining room and in the very relaxed atmosphere they could appreciate first hand my design work. The advantages of minimal overhead costs with tax deductions, no costs or time wasted with transport, relaxed environment, ability to concentrate on being productive to give it my best shot – and above all maximum flexibility to change outweighed the minimal disruption to the home environment.

The decision to have my own practice proved to be right. The space was great – but the house became too small for me and a new baby – “the office” became the nursery and dad took second place! It was time to expand the office in any case – so the next few steps in the growth of the business involved sharing commercial office space with other designers. The advantages included an ability to create a more corporate atmosphere for clients, room to expand to employ staff, less distractions, a clear separation of home and office life, and the ability to develop a balanced social and professional life mixing with colleagues. The higher overheads, less tax deductions for the home, time taken with transport, provided a more formal work environment but sadly less time spent with a growing family.

On balance of the above, it was decided to move to a larger house and create a new home office for me and my growing team of staff. I wanted the best of both worlds. This option worked for many years – until expansion of the office became yet again a reason to change. The advantages of combining the best of all options to date, more effective financially, balancing the relaxed atmosphere with an area of the house devoted to the commercial business, maintaining the balanced mix of social and professional life, and being able to be more significantly involved in the development of the family – needed to be balanced against the fact that not all staff felt comfortable working in someone’s home, sharing facilities with the family.

So with the need for further expansion, and to maintain the advantages of being at home whilst minimising

the overlap of family with staff – the next step was a move to a purpose built residential & commercial building. It allowed all the positive home office advantages whilst allowing expansion of the business to take on partners and ultimately to merge with an international design company. The ability to receive more commercial type clients in a commercial environment displaying our design expertise, with less overlap of family and staff on the most part outweighed the inability to expand or contract the business.

Subject to the whims of unstable global finances, the need for staff and therefore space required greater flexibility than ever for the types of international projects we were seeking. An impact of the Global

Financial Crisis was that like us, many businesses now required greater flexibility to cope with change. Serviced office companies, popular since the 1980’s rallied to the demand by creating more permanent and upmarket centres. We considered our options at this point – and working now within a serviced office centre has been the most appropriate next step. It allows flexibility to expand or contract

according to the staff requirements and types of projects we now undertake, the availability at a reasonable cost for a variety of meeting and conference rooms with ability to connect to our other offices in Asia and the Middle East, use of office space in other cities and countries, corporate reception and catering facilities, and generally provides a very upmarket environment for our staff and clients. Whilst less personal, it is an ideal solution for the development of the business at this point.

30 odd years and 8 office locations later, the experiences have been very varied. I have been fortunate to allow changes to suit the balance of my family/social and working life – whilst allowing for the changes required to suit the development of my business. The changes have been invigorating and allowed me to appreciate the need for a working environment that suits me, suits my family, suits my staff and suits my clients – a successful balance!

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