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What's trending right now in the office furniture industry? - by Ron Lanzo

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We've seen a lot of trends come and go within the office furniture industry over the years, and this past year, 2019 has been no exception! For some time now, one of the biggest new trends include lower panel heights. They've continued to shrink to the point where they no longer provide any form of privacy. When I first started here at AFR more than 11 years ago, the standard panel height requested was 67" high, as it afforded what was then referred to as "standing privacy" height. Anyone sitting could absolutely not look over the top, and the added height provided space for overhead storage shelves or cabinets as well as task lighting. In order to see or have a discussion with your neighbor, the employee on the other side of the wall, you had to stand up. And it helped if you were at least 5 ft. 8 inches tall—otherwise you'd have to stand on your tip toes to see over the top. We also had the occasional customer like SAFRAN MorphoTrust, the people who made TSA Pre Check screening a reality at the airports. They rented our 85" high panels complete with doors so that they could have complete privacy with their clients who were applying for a TSA Pre Check pass and supplying confidential information. Fast forward, now only a few short years and panel heights keep getting shorter. In fact, even our 67" high panels are passed over and clients wanting what's known as "seated privacy" are opting for our 53" panel height.

The last two customer service call centers have both opted for the 53" height, and a simple half height shelf for storage. Some seated privacy is provided and this seems to be just enough to afford some privacy while their customer service reps are on the phones with clients.

The shortest and now seemingly most popular panel heights are 32" height or 39" height! This trend started a few years ago and was very popular with Wall St. clients like bond traders. This trend carried over now to the increased popularity of co-working spaces, like WeWork. It seems the younger Millennial workers are perfectly comfortable with no privacy screens at all, and prefer being able to see all of their fellow works and neighbors.

Trends tend to come in waves, and the newest one that has been the most obvious has been the

interest in white furniture. It tends to be bright, modern and upbeat compared to the old traditional mahogany, or even the maple, oak or cherry finishes of the past. Since we introduced our new AXTON Series of white table desks and matching white desk chairs, we've seen our customers respond with increased interest in updating their current office spaces. We recently did a complete overhaul and update of our website www.rentfurniture.com and as you'll see when you check this site, we're featuring an all new assortment and array of modern, upbeat products and many in white! We're seeing a trend towards incorporating some residential products with commercial desks to create what we've now termed, "resimerital" and although this word has definitely not been officially added to the Webster's Dictionary, it may only be a matter of time. This trend mixes comfortable seating along with other necessary items like conference tables with power and data communications included so teams can work jointly on important projects. Conference rooms are no longer dark and dreary, but rather bright conference rooms that spark innovation. Height adjustable tables so it's now possible to sit for part of the day, and to raise the table to standing height which increases blood flow and adds energy as the work day progresses.

Even major banks like Capital One are touting their new cafes which have more in common with a Starbucks than any bank lobby we've known. We're definitely seeing companies who want to make their employees as comfortable as possible as they no longer work a typical 9 to 5 schedule and are often expected to be available on demand regardless of what time's on the clock.

And so, as I had mentioned previously, panel heights get shorter, and in many cases disappear completely as companies look to create open spaces that work more effectively without barriers to impede creativity. Teamwork appears to be the driving force behind some of these new office designs and that's good for employee morale and company productivity. And when new shorter cubicle workstations are still required for certain areas like accounting and customer service, you'll see flexible workstations designed for efficiency.

If you're considering modernizing your office, AFR Furniture Rental Inc., is ready to assist your efforts. You'll find so many great ideas. Click on the word "modern" while you're on the Office and Commercial section of our website and you'll be shown a quick guide to office updating 101. Or pick up the phone and give us a call—we'd be glad to help you with this journey.

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