



**BUSINESS
FURNITURE**

CHANGING SHAPES

The shape of office furniture has changed considerably over the years. Today it encompasses a variety of new trends and practices, which have literally molded it into something far beyond the simple desk and chair. The flooding of new trends in design and industry, a shift in corporate thinking and even the introduction of South Africa to the international market, have all contributed to the metamorphosis, says managing director of CN Business Furniture, Robbie Bergh.

If one looks at the office chair as an example, one can clearly see the market's evolution. Trends including the ease of manufacture and assembly, the move away from laminated chairs to metal and polycarbonate, the importance of ergonomics and design have all changed the shape of the modern office chair.

But Bergh points out that the office furniture industry itself has also changed. Since the new millennium, South African business furniture suppliers began to realise the importance of sourcing globally, and with that, a "Tsunami" of Asian chairs flooded the market. However, Bergh likens the contents of a container from China, to a lucky packet, "you simply don't know what you're going to get". The quality of merchandise can range from shockingly poor, to surprisingly good and a few products manufactured under European supervision, are excellent. Regardless of quality, the Asian impact on the office furniture market has been huge, with most components now being manufactured there. CN however, still remains ardent local supporters, buying more than 80% of their components and finished products from local manufacturers.

The design and layout of the modern working space, has also taken its cue from rapidly changing technology, ergonomics and the domestic furniture market.



The changing shape of Office Furniture

There are 3 current key words in finding the perfect office balance. Comfort, aesthetics and sustainability. The greatest of these is still comfort. Most people don't care how great the office looks, if they're not comfortable in their chair, they're not comfortable at all. They'll fidget, slump down, hunch over. Maybe they'll get some lower back pain that will require them to be out of work or file an insurance claim. They won't feel as productive because they won't feel good. A conference room table won't cause anyone to be unproductive, but the chair they're sitting in during the conference, that's another story.



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The impact of the IT industry on office furniture design cannot be downplayed. As this industry grows and evolves at breakneck speed, so too must the furniture that houses it. Allowances have been made to accommodate the numerous connections for CPUs, keyboards, mouse pads, scanners and printers. Changes in design and the increased activity at workstations, has necessitated desks and screens to accommodate clean power, normal power as well as data and telephone cabling.

Another trend impacting office furniture design is the concept of ergonomics. As more companies acknowledge the psychological and physical influences of the workspace on employees, a move towards creating office furniture that nurtures physical and mental health is imperative. Says Bergh, "The focus on health and safety in the workplace is rapidly increasing. Some call it 'wellness at work' and it involves forward thinking on the designs of desks and chairs which accommodate a sit/stand concept or pivotal chairs".



Ergonomics are being taken seriously, because we now realise that most of us spend more time in the office, than in our cars and therefore a good office chair is vital.

The ebb and flow of creative innovation in home living designs also impacts office furniture. The domestic furniture market tends to dictate trends like colour, fabrics and finishes such as glass, wood, chrome or stainless steel. A need to see domestic design carried through into the workspace is indicative of the changing face of the modern office.





With more people working flexi time or from home, the work environment is becoming more comfortable and relaxed. Thus the transmutation of office and domestic furniture is closing the gap between work and home. This crossover is clearly seen in the similarities between domestic and office fabrics, as well the similarities between desks designed for home use and those for the office. A similar cross over is occurring elsewhere, as office furniture also makes its way into restaurants and refectory settings.



Another trend includes the "de-engineering" of products, involving the use of different, more effective components. This has reduced the cost of office furniture, and improved aesthetics. A trend toward logistical design is also preferred. A flat pack concept is now worked into the initial design of the furniture, enabling better -wrapped and protected products.

With their finger clearly on the pulse of current and future trends, as well as more than 60-years in the business, the CN Business Furniture Group is one of the leaders in quality products and creative workspace solutions. The CN group offers a wide range that covers all aspects of a clients needs. Not just suppliers of office furniture, CN Business Furniture, through its portfolio of segmented brands and businesses; designs and enables intelligent, energising workspaces.

And as Bergh says, "we are not happy until you are entirely satisfied."

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