



Steps to a successful office fit-out – what to include in your design brief

The prospect of redesigning an office can be daunting, but if planned correctly, office design can dramatically improve business performance.

Our past experience with clients has proven that a well designed workplace is an important factor in driving a business forward, increasing productivity, staff retention and facilitating recruitment. A successful environment is undoubtedly the result of an intelligently planned scheme, and the only way to achieve this is a well-formulated design brief.

So what is a design brief? And what should it include? The initial briefing document is a key element to the future success of your project: it communicates your business objectives or 'vision' to your appointed design team. Concisely written objectives will ensure that everyone involved has a thorough understanding of the 'big picture' as well as the detailed elements; it also provides a benchmark for the project to be assessed and reviewed in the future.

The brief should highlight key goals, current and future working practices, corporate culture, operational and technical workplace needs, cultural issues, headcount information and finally budget and timescales. It is crucial that your fit-out partner understands how your company operates and your objectives for the next 5 to 10 years.

A successful brief should contain both hard and soft data. Hard data includes empirical data which is relatively easy to compile, such as headcount, meeting rooms, staff facilities requirements, etc... Each of these facts will have a direct implication on the space planning: working practices such as hot desking, home-working, privacy requirements and hierarchical structure will help define the number of cellular offices and open plan areas whereas the number of visitors will dictate the size of the reception area and meeting rooms. Identifying how teams interact with each other, the nature of their tasks and their working style (sedentary or nomadic) will also help define the layout and allocation of space.

Staff facilities such as breakout areas will be determined by how the company intends the space to be used, whether it is to provide eating facilities, or to double-up as an informal meeting area, or an internet café/recreational area. Information regarding facilities requirements such as the Computer room, post room and tea points should also be included.

Furniture and storage are important elements to consider; your brief should highlight your budget and style requirements. It may be that bespoke workstations are the way forward to optimise your space as opposed to standard desks.

Soft data is more difficult to communicate as it revolves around the company values and culture, and greatly varies across business sectors. It can include information about the desired image projected to clients or shareholders (welcoming, professional, dynamic, cutting-edge etc...), new culture/working practices envisaged, branding, social and environmental concerns.

Your preferred colour scheme and finishes can be included in your brief but usually occur further down the line. Bear in mind that colour is will one of the most mood-altering devices; it is also one of the most cost-effective ways to bring a desired ambiance into a workplace. When introducing corporate colours into the scheme, take into consideration how it will affect the staff. Strong branding can be important, but the inappropriate translation of corporate colours can have a negative effect.

Some of our clients find the idea of compiling any amount of information overwhelming. At Area Sq we organise brainstorming sessions to help clients create their brief. Designers are here to listen to your ideas and directions whilst offering advice and guidance (DDA, sustainability, Health & Safety...). Creating a new office is an exciting project, the brief is the road map that ensures you will get where you wanted to. The better you plan it, the smoother and more fun the journey will be.

About Area Sq

Launched in January 2000 by Clive Lucking, Nigel Hudson and James Cornwell, Area Sq specialises in the design, project management, space planning, fitting out, refurbishment and furnishing of commercial office interiors. Area Sq is based in Egham, Surrey and Central London and undertakes projects of 2000 sq ft up to 70,000 sq ft throughout the UK.

Area Sq clients include Reed Elsevier, Sungard, Cendant, Microsoft, Thomson Wealth Management, Epson, Budgens, TATA, Pharmion and Capita.