

# MEET AND GREET

Receptions are evolving to meet the changing needs of today's office buildings. But there's still a long way to go

**J**ust as changing workspaces reflect the changing nature of organisations, receptions are becoming more than a waiting area where a smiling employee behind a desk tells you where to go. As the public face of an organisation, responsible for a visitor's first impression, today's reception has to work harder to fulfil its role.

First and foremost, it must be friendly, warm and welcoming. "Reception or lobby spaces should be overwhelmingly inviting and representative of the building or the occupants, akin to walking into a home. It needs to have character and warmth," says Pernille Stafford, Principal of Resonate Interiors.

Creating a good first impression is vital, agrees Steve Bays, MD of office and contract furniture supplier Century Office. "It is very important to make the space open, clean and sleek," he says. "At the same time it's imperative to ensure it is multifunctional, comfortable and inviting, focusing on office wellbeing, nice décor, furniture design and, most importantly, ergonomics such as sit/stand desks."

Décor, furnishings, visual features, acoustics, even smell all play their part. "It's essential to consider

acoustics – hollow-sounding lobbies are a thing of the past," says Stafford. "Generally, designers should consider all the senses. Sound is very important, music sets the tone and differs depending on the company. A lawyer's office will sound very different from a high-tech IT business. Similarly, colours and tones need to appeal to visitors. Smell is now also being added as another layer to the sensory experience, designed to reinforce the essence of the space with evocative fragrances."

Artwork is also important in setting the tone, she says. "Although subjective, it showcases the narrative detailing the occupants' preferences and represents the ethos of the business."

Jonathan Hindle, Group MD, EMEA, at furniture manufacturer KI, notes that boundaries are blurring between offices, living rooms, university campuses and trendy hotels – which is impacting on reception design. "Traditionally, domestic treatments offer a great opportunity to enhance workspaces too," he says.

Reception areas are also becoming more functional and interactive as they play a bigger role in the life of the building. "It should be a space that can be used for work, plug and play," says Stafford.

"It is a communicative space that speaks volumes about the business or the building. The successful ones are vibrant spaces where people are happy to chat and interact." Bays goes further, noting that traditional reception solutions are increasingly being replaced with "less intimidating and more buzzy and informal zones", such as café and break-out areas.

However, none of this is to overlook the importance of the personal touch. For Stafford, elevating the quality of service to the standards of a hotel concierge has been a major change over the past few years, alongside the ability to check-in via an iPad. "Digital sign-in is becoming more popular, but the personal approach is what people really want," she says. "A welcoming smile goes a very long way to make visitors and employees alike feel good and relaxed about the reason for their visit."

Going forward, Stafford expects to see growing access to digital media and shared receptions offer larger buildings, allowing for a more comprehensive service. The trend towards treating receptions as part of the office space rather than a hived-off front of house area will gain momentum, she believes, creating a space that is more part of the community of workers.



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