



# The office isn't dying, it's going through a renaissance!

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**Richard Andrews**

Director at Inspiration Office (Pty) Ltd

It wasn't long after smart phones, tablets and ubiquitous Wi-Fi that workplace experts predicted the end of the office. And while a telecommuting trend took root for a while, it is now beginning to reverse with large American companies like IBM, Honeywell and Yahoo leading the change.

But also thanks to offices that are now much more human friendly.

Said Richard Andrews, Managing Director of Inspiration Office, an Africa-wide office space and furniture consultancy: "The thinking went along these lines: if technology allows people to work anywhere, then who needs the office?"

"As it turns out, the vast majority of workers do - because work, at its essence, is a social process. Even people armed with the latest mobile devices still come to the office to connect with other people and to access technology they can't carry around."

"The office didn't go away, but it's now evolving into something fundamentally different."

"We are in the midst of an office renaissance."

And the proof is evident in some of the world's biggest companies.

After several decades of allowing employees to perform their jobs remotely, IBM recently announced that it wanted many of its remote workers back in the office.

Between 1995 and 2009, the company shrank its office workforce. Other companies soon followed suit: Work-from-home became a desirable perk of many white-collar jobs.

Yahoo has also reversed its stance on home workers and said that since calling back its staff, employee engagement was up, product launches increased significantly and teams were thriving.

American conglomerate Honeywell also joined the back to the office trend by banning telecommuting for most of its workers worldwide.

Said Andrews: "It's not surprising there is a swing back to the office. The workplace has become a catalyst for energy and buzz."

"People are again looking for inspiration and creativity at work, as well as human-centered technology that makes life easier. These ideas are being embraced and adopted at a rapid pace thanks to new people friendly design and facilities."

Traditionally, offices were focused on uniformity and standards. Much of the space was dedicated to individual workstations, separated into departments, where people spent the majority of their time working alone. A cafeteria provided a place to eat lunch and large meeting rooms were used mostly for collaboration.

But by reducing the number of dedicated individual workstations and creating an ecosystem of spaces, people now have the freedom to choose how and where to work.

"Appealing offices now have a social hub, previously just a cafeteria, which shifts away from supporting just nourishment to now also becoming a place for workers to connect and collaborate," said Andrews.

"They also have a nomadic camp - purposely placed near the social hub - to support mobile behaviours. The additional

settings offer mobile workers a place to work alone or with others. Workers can see and be seen by coworkers, or choose a private setting for focused work."

The concept of a 'resident neighbourhood' is also proving popular and includes spaces for managers in the open plan to promote learning and quick problem solving. Resource Centres offers workers a space to securely store coats and bags and access meeting tools.

"People want to feel a connection to the places where they work, where they can see themselves in the space, versus something that feels imposed upon them. Well designed offices and productivity gains from working closely with smart people is driving the office renaissance," Andrews concluded.