



How to sweat office space in uncertain economic times

- Published on December 7, 2017

Richard Andrews

Director at Inspiration Office (Pty) Ltd

South Africa is facing severe economic headwinds and many companies are hesitant to move into bigger spaces, even if they need them.

But there are solutions, according to Richard Andrews, Managing Director of Inspiration Office, an Africa-wide office space and furniture consultancy.

"Many offices have a low utilisation portion of their space which means they are paying for space they don't even use."

"Unused space is a very costly resource! But there are clever ways to make existing space work harder."

1. Store documents offsite

"Despite the growing popularity of cloud storage and electronic documents, many businesses tie up a significant amount of space by holding on to hard copy files." Andrews noted.

According to Douglas Isabelle, Managing Director of DOC-IT, a leading electronic document and business process management company, less than 5% of companies in South Africa use Electronic Document Management Systems (EDMS).

"Removing hard copy from your premises allows you to free up spaces and be more environmentally conscious," Andrews commented. It can also make it easier to meet safety standards as excess clutter can impede a speedy exit in the event of emergency. You can free up space by digitizing files or, if you are obliged to hang onto hard-copy (or simply prefer it), store it with a file storage company. The latter means extra security for your documents and is considerably cheaper than renting prime office space just for storage.

2. Use smart furniture

Said Andrews: "We have smart phones, smart cars, smart watches but people tend to forget how useful smart furniture is." Smart furniture is furniture that serves many purposes but looks the same as "normal" furniture.



Andrews points to HIVE (photo above and below), a recent introduction to South Africa, as an example of smart furniture. It is a cocoon-like desk that can be added to empty spaces and it instantly provides a well lit, ergonomically designed private place to work and also serves as a storage facility. "It creates a lounge level of comfort in the office in a small space."



3. The 3 month purge, every three months

"Be ruthless with what you keep in your office, and that goes for everything," Andrews advised. Making your office as clutter-free as possible improves productivity and makes offices safer. "Stuff builds up quickly so we advise people to go through their workspaces every three months and throw away things that are no longer serving a purpose."

4. Forget the big desk dream

"Everything is getting smaller in offices, and big desks are like dinosaurs - long gone." and Andrews. Desks are smaller, more

efficient and can be designed to what a person needs rather than making it a statement of importance.

"Get a small work station, perhaps one with a couple of filing cabinets that slide underneath. Workers keep everything in their computers anyway, so why take up valuable space with a large desk?"

5. Private work spaces within existing spaces

Many offices make the mistake of thinking they need to add whole extra rooms to create private spaces for people to work or have any argument with the insurance company. "But adding a whole room is pricey and take up a lot of space." noted Andrews. "And then all that has been created is just one extra room, which is likely to be used by only one person at a time.

"It's much cheaper to use things like the SpeakEasy Phone Booths (image below), which can be added to various places around the office to let employees have a private conversation - and they have a very small (& efficient) footprint."



For meetings, products like Igloo (pictured below) can be added to empty spaces for instant, private meeting rooms without having to build a whole new room and add value to your landlord.



6. Think vertically

"When people look for extra space in an office they think horizontally, but there is a huge opportunity to take advantage of the vertical space," Andrews noted.

"Use shelving that attaches to the studs in your walls. Adhere sturdy pockets to your walls to hold active files you access, And, a desk with shelving above it (like NXT shown below) can work well without taking up more floorspace," Andrews concluded.

