

Free Address:

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real estate brokerage firm **CBRE**, 52 percent of the 138 who responded said they anticipate implementing some level of unassigned seating within the next three years, and 14 percent said they would convert their office space so that all of it would have unassigned seating.

Millennials Bring Change

“The labor is demanding it, we have a new workforce of these millennials,” said **Andrew Ewald**, a first vice president and tenant representative leader at CBRE.

“They’re just wired differently. They want to have a sense of community and collaboration,” Ewald said. “Employees are happy. They feel like they have a choice.”

Employers like the concept in part because a free address system requires less space than a traditional office setup, Ewald said.

“It’s a chance to reduce operating expense,” Ewald said. “If you can build a culture that has a flexible work environment, you can eliminate or reduce the need for excess office space.”

Moss Adams made the change to a free address system three years ago when it moved into new offices in UTC, which Wisniewski said has served as the model for the company’s Bay Area offices.

“When you look at how space was used historically, it was a place you were assigned to go and work in the same spot all the time and, depending on what level you were at, what that space would look like,” Wisniewski said.

The size and location of offices were status symbols.

A free address setup “enables you to be more mobile and it assumes you might be more effective sitting in different environments, in different spaces potentially with different people, depending on what you’re doing,” Wisniewski said. “It allows for someone to pick where they’re going to be most effective.”

Wisniewski said she’s never encountered a conflict with two people wanting the same space.

“There are plenty of spots/spaces with different features that make people want to come in and work in spaces with each other,” Wisniewski said.

For example, Wisniewski said if she wants a space with a double desk and one is taken, “I just move to the next double available. If I have a preference, such as facing the window, I move to the next double that faces the window.”

What could have been Wisniewski’s office in a traditional arrangement is a corner area dubbed the Top Gun Lounge where anyone can go to work or relax.

“I am more than happy to share it with other people,” Wisniewski said.

Although most people at Moss Adams don’t have assigned workspaces, “it doesn’t assume you close everything up and have to move every night,” Wisniewski said. People can use the same spot for as long as they need it to accomplish their work.

‘Open and Collaborative’

Illumina, a genomics company headquartered in San Diego, has adopted a hybrid office model it calls its “Work Anywhere” program in the i3 building at UTC.

“For those employees and job functions that require a work station and a dedicated and assigned desk, we will make sure they have that,” said **Jenny Durbin**, Illumina’s senior manager for facilities planning.



Photos show free address office space of Amobee, top, Red Door Interactive, right, and Microsoft, left. Most workers have no assigned work stations but choose where they work depending on what they’re doing.

Others who spend much of their time working in groups, in conferences or out of the building choose where they work in Illumina’s i3 building space, depending on what they’re doing from day-to-day.

“Part of our values is that we’re open and collaborative. Our workplace should reflect our culture and values,” Durbin said. “You don’t work at a desk, you work at Illumina and you work in a variety of places.”

Every Illumina employee has their own laptop, which they can plug in wherever they work.

CEO **Francis deSouza** has an assigned workspace, but not a private office, Durbin said.

CBRE’s offices in UTC Westfield mall are fully free address, with no assigned work spaces for anyone, from executives to support staff.

People arrive in the morning and pick where they’ll work, from rows of desks to conference rooms to huddle rooms that are like large phone booths.

Lounge Area Option

They can also work in a large open lounge area or gather at small benches.

“There’s a tremendous amount of energy, there’s a tremendous amount of collaboration,” Ewald said.

Each day, the process starts over. CBRE brokers and other workers can use lockers to store whatever they need to keep on hand, but the work spaces are cleared from day-to-day.

The free address concept is not new.

Frank Wolden, principal of **AVRP Skyport Studios**, said he designed a version of free address offices about 10 years ago.

But AVRP Skyport Studios President **Chris Veum** said it’s becoming more popular with his firm’s clients in San Diego and elsewhere, including **Amobee** digital marketing, **Red Door Interactive** and **Microsoft**.

‘Hoteling’

In one version, called “hoteling,” workers don’t have permanent assigned desks but reserve space in advance.

Veum said AVRP Skyport designed offices with a hoteling system for Microsoft in Chicago, where the company had multiple locations with workers moving among them.

“You’d find out if there was space available online before you went in, then

you could pick a desk. Every desk had a number,” Veum said.

Adapting to Change

There is a cautionary note to all of this — people who are used to working in more traditional office environments may need time and coaxing to adjust.

“You have to show them the benefits,” Ewald said. “You have to do some hand-holding.”

Sometimes, it’s a company’s upper echelon that needs the most hand-holding, Veum said.

He recalled meeting in a workshop with top-level executives at a North County company in which they outlined how many desks they wanted, where they wanted them and where various departments would be within the company’s space.

“They were kind of telling us where people were going to sit,” Veum said. “When we opened up the workshop and we started talking with people, it was so counter to what we just heard from the executives, it was hilarious.”

What the workers wanted was an open work area with the ability to pick where they’d work. “I was sitting there trying not to laugh,” Veum said.