

Food Glorious Food



A Cafe at Google Dublin

We've all read about the awesome food at Google. In a survey of IT workers conducted earlier this year by Forbes contributor, Kate Harrison, "Good Eats" was voted second in a list of favorite employer-provided amenities, right behind "Game Rooms" and ahead of "Physical Health." Food has definitely become a new workplace perk, and not just in the tech world. More and more, clients across all industries are building amenity spaces that either provide food or support it. Just as most people gravitate to the kitchen at a party, office cafés and cafeterias - whether

they are fully catered facilities, a place to heat up a homemade lunch, or merely a place to eat that's not your desk - have become the heart of the office.

Leveraging Real Estate. As a former financial services employee, I'm well acquainted with the corporate cafeteria. Back in the day, these spaces were used almost exclusively for meal times, so I was charmed to see my first "café as social space" when furniture manufacturer, Steelcase, opened their WorkLife Center at 4 Columbus Circle in New York City in 1996. At the time it seemed radical to me that a company would introduce a social space in the midst of the workplace, yet that was exactly the point. The concept has not only endured, but thrived; over the years the New York cafe has evolved from a single, focused, hub space to one that today accommodates large numbers of people throughout the day and evening. Moreover, when Steelcase recently revitalized their Grand Rapids Headquarters, they started with the cafeteria to set the tone for design of the remainder of the campus.

Cafe/cafeteria spaces can be a great way for companies to leverage their real estate. Unlike the quiet rooms, collaboration zones, lounge areas and other amenities that companies build as givebacks to employees in an ever-densifying workplace, these spaces don't tend to get turned into offices and workstations to accommodate growth. Rather, the café/cafeteria now plays multiple roles. During the day employees can use them to perform solo work, collaborate in small groups, and hold town hall meetings; after hours, they can serve as event spaces in which employees socialize and clients are entertained, or they can generate income by being hired out for events outside the firm. Whether building a café, a grab 'n go, or a cafeteria, designing these facilities is as much science and business as it is art. It demands detailed knowledge of the labyrinth of codes, an understanding of the workings and circulation patterns of a professional kitchen, and expertise in venting any kind of space, in any kind of building. Here are a few trends we have been watching.

Customer Experience. According to The NPD Group, a leading market researcher, 40% of consumers are loyal to a brand despite promotions offered by other establishments. In retail this means every aspect of the design must represent the brand; in corporate and institutional food service the focus is on capturing the culture of the organization. Together with good food, location and price, the artful combination of aesthetics, layout, circulation, service and other amenities, creates a customer experience that draws people back time and again.

Variety & Healthy Choices. Just as we're seeing a demand for a variety of activity-based space types and transparency in the workplace, people want food choices too, and they want to know what they're getting. As Exhibition Cooking, themed Action Stations and Self-Serve that makes labeling, ingredients and preparation transparent and accessible have become the norm, the design of these spaces has become more complex. Front of house display, delivery, occupancy planning, circulation and point of payment must now be seamlessly woven with back of house operations like shared preparation, storage, catering and administration.

Scalable Use. Eating habits are changing; breakfast meals are on the rise, lunch is becoming the largest meal and people are working (and eating) 24/7. Corporations and institutional cafeterias must plan for peak occupancy and varying degrees of access ranging from full food service, to vending and grab and go, to alternative use of the space for training, meetings and special events. For companies wanting to provide convenient access to food and beverage without investing in a cafeteria, honor-system vending is an option, and we're seeing these stations co-located with break out lounges and cafe seating. In either case, the design emphasis is on what's visible to the customer.

Technology Integration. Technology in food service is not only driving greater operational efficiencies but shaping layout and design. Back of house is all about assembly line set up and cook/chill systems, remote refrigeration and automatic ice delivery systems - centrally controlled and linked to building systems. Customer-facing technology includes wifi throughout, video display of news and entertainment, digital and web menus, self-service kiosks and point of sale systems - all of which drive and determine layout, occupancy and circulation, and inform the aesthetics that will enhance the customer experience.

Sustainability. Creating attractive, dynamic environments that deliver peak performance is a significant investment. Protecting that investment means specifying energy efficient equipment and materials, and furniture and finishes that can endure not only customer use but the abuse of cleaning products and maintenance crews. Additionally, for a space to look good and perform well from day one into the future, the design must ultimately transcend trends and deliver functionality that can adapt to multiple uses and users over time.

A New Form of Networking. Ironically, one of the best endorsements I found for food-oriented spaces came from Ross Resnick, CEO and founder of online catering hub and mobile food (food truck) dispatch, Roaming Hunger. "We consider it a new form of networking. Senior executives are [standing in line] with the rank-and-file...It's very democratic..." An observation that applies as readily to the cafeteria line as the food truck line. Whether congregating to grab a meal or a snack, seeking a change of scene, or spill over from fully-subscribed conference rooms, these spaces offer opportunities for serendipitous encounters that can promote collegiality and enhance the culture of the organization.



Fran Ferrone is the Director of Workplace Innovation for Mancini•Duffy, a New York City-based architecture, planning and interiors design firm

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR WORKPLACE INNOVATION

People are a company's most valuable asset and in today's business environment it is people who make the difference. Our mission is to combine real estate, technology and business processes to create exceptional spaces that empower people to do their best work. We align design solutions with actual business drivers and create performance metrics to establish a feedback loop that continues to inform. This builds agility into the workplace to support the way people work today while enabling its evolution to support the way they will work in the future.



Contact the Center for Workplace Innovation:
CWI@manciniduffy.com | 646 495.7156 | www.workplaceinnovation.com | #CWInnovation

