

# SCOPE



Kingsland Scott Bauer Associates

Pittsburgh, PA

## CALL CENTER DESIGN: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BASICS

WELCOME TO THE charter issue of KSBA's *Scope*, a newsletter dedicated to call center and customer service center design. It's always a challenge to write the lead article in the first issue of an informational publication. The temptation is to spend too much time setting the stage and too little conveying information readers can use to improve their call center workplaces. Therefore, in the interest of brevity, let's set the stage by conveying some general information about KSBA and call center design in bullet-point format.

### What Is KSBA?

- ① A 13-year old, 14-person firm practicing architecture, planning, interior design and project management based on the concept of "Performance Design," a method of relating design decisions to increased profitability through reduced capital costs, energy consumption and health care costs as well as increased productivity. (Look for more about Performance Design in future issues.)
- ① A professional firm specializing in call center design with the expertise to apply performance design criteria to high-density, technology-intensive spaces.

### Why Are Call Centers Different?

- ① Although society is rapidly transitioning from the industrial age to the information/technology age, building and workplace environment design attitudes have only started to change in response.
- ① A large part of the necessary design transition involves successfully interfacing computers and people, an issue critical to successful call center design.
- ① Because they are high density, high stress and technically complex environments, call centers "push the design envelope" in terms of mechanical systems, acoustics, lighting, power, communications and furniture design.
- ① Although typically treated as adaptations to conventional office space, call centers are unique for two reasons:
  - ☎ There are additional design considerations related to technology and density, which must be considered.
  - ☎ Poor design solutions have a greater negative impact on the bottom line.

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*Scope*, the call center design newsletter, is published by:

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## An Overview of Design Issues

Call center design is rapidly evolving, thanks to developing technology that permits solutions not possible only months ago. The demand for new call center space often dictates schedules that allow little time to research and analyze emerging technology; therefore, it is important that designers be aware, through experience, of issues specific to call center design. Some things KSBA Architects have learned include:

- ① Lighting is critical. The most common physical problem in keyboard-intensive environments is eye strain. A computer screen acts as a mirror, primarily reflecting the ceiling surface. Lighting must be designed to provide uniform ambient illumination at levels high enough to prevent extreme contrast, but low enough to reduce glare.
- ① Typical power issues, such as surge protection and uninterrupted power supplies, apply to call center design in addition to more sophisticated issues, such as power harmonics. Computer transformers tend to shunt a portion of the electronic sine wave, which finds its way back to the main transformer, multiplies and disturbs overall harmonics.
- ① HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) systems designed for typical office space (particularly before the 1989 revisions to the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Engineers [ASHRAE] Code 90.1) are often inadequate for call centers because of their higher density of both people and computers.
- ① Ceiling height should increase as floor size increases. Large spaces with low ceilings often feel claustrophobic (higher ceilings are also beneficial for penetration of natural light into the space and even distribution of artificial light).
- ① Proper ergonomic design and training provide excellent opportunities to reduce health care costs.
- ① Many call centers experience high absenteeism and turnover. A well-designed, high-quality environment can go a long way toward improving the bottom line through decreased turnover, absenteeism and increased productivity.

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Look for more in-depth information on these and other call center design issues in future editions of KSBA *Scope*. Meanwhile, we welcome questions about your call or customer service center along with comments about our publication and how we can make it more useful for you. ①

### EDITOR'S NOTE:

*In case you're wondering, "Scope," the name of this publication, refers to the "scope of work" that makes up all of the design and construction work necessary for a project's successful completion. Because call centers are so unique and specialized, it's important that their scopes encompass all of the relevant issues listed above and more, not just those associated with generic office space design. ①*



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