Where Should We Meet?

More collaboration and less office space is raising the importance of wayfinding and room scheduling systems.

Let's get together. This popular refrain is getting harder to accomplish. Office workers spend far too much time (at least 15 minutes a day) searching for the right place to meet. It's frustrating, confusing and just not productive. It's almost as if we have work to do before we can get together with our colleagues to tackle our real work.

The problem has grown over the last two decades. The amount of time people spend doing collaborative work (meetings, calls, emails) has gone up about 50% and takes up 80% more of their time (HBR). And we're on twice as many teams as we were just five years ago (Microsoft). Yet, the amount of office space is going in the opposite direction. In 2010, a typical office employee had an average of 225 square feet of space. By 2020, that number is expected to be an average of 120 (Avison Young) with nearly 70% of people working in some form of an open plan. The result is a squeeze on space, specifically places to meet.

So, what's 15 minutes? Or a little stroll to find an empty space now and again? The time adds up when you're talking about thousands of employees over hundreds of days per year. It's a significant, unnecessary loss in productivity. And, consider how you feel when you don't know where to go or don't have what you need to get your job done. You lack confidence, feel anxious and unsure – hardly the conditions for engagement or productive work.

THE NEXT GENERATION OF ROOM SCHEDULING
Discover how the new RoomWizard makes finding and scheduling a room much easier.

As the number of meeting spaces decrease and the need for collaboration rises , the importance of room scheduling solutions is growing. These systems that let people reserve spaces and act as signage to help people find where they're going are not new. But, as things have changed in how people work, these solutions have largely remained the same. So, Steelcase designers and engineers set out to develop the next generation of room scheduling tools. But first, they used workplace observations and user testing to assess what new challenges needed to be addressed:

- **Collaboration has changed.** There's more of it, more scheduled meetings and more of a desire to accommodate impromptu work sessions.
- **Expectations have changed.** Easy is the name of the game. As technology has improved over time, people expect a simple, intuitive user experience.
- **Security and integration are essential.** Organizations need scheduling systems they can trust and that works with their existing technology.

- **Customization is key.** Every organization wants to express its unique brand and culture. The ability for room scheduling devices, which appear on many spaces throughout campus, to complement each organization's bespoke design and brand is crucial. In addition, custom visual cues assist in wayfinding.

In order to meet the needs of people and organizations today, designers and engineers created the all new RoomWizard. Its bold visual cues make sure people can see critical meeting information from a distance. A customizable background lets organizations express their brand and makes it easier (and more fun) to find rooms. Imagine looking for the Forest Room or the Marketing area by color or picture and the impact that can make on people.

The new RoomWizard supports two distinct scenarios for meetings identified during the user testing phase. The first is planned and scheduled meetings ahead of time. A new, easy-to-read interface helps people find where they're going and lets others know a space is taken and for how long. The second (and becoming more common) is impromptu meetings. When you bump into a colleague or decide on a last minute need to connect, RoomWizard helps you quickly identify an open space and reserve on-demand right at the device.

"People are busier than ever and the last thing they want to do is interact with a complex device outside a room," says Trevor Deters, Steelcase Smart + Connected product category manager. "So, we made sure the most critical meeting room information stands out. It sounds simple. But, we've been able to make finding and scheduling a room significantly easier for busy people."

Improving an employee's experience can make all the difference. Recently, PTC, a high-tech software development company, moved into a new headquarters on the Boston Seaport. Their previous suburban campus didn't have any way to identify if a room was booked or for people to find places to meet. People had to stand up, yell and walk around looking for the people and places they needed. The addition of RoomWizard in their new workplace has dramatically eased employees' transition into the new space.

"I use those devices every single day," says Greg Shozda, a member of PTC's Business Leadership Rotational Program. "The green and red indicators let us know quickly if the room is available or not. Also, it's great if you need to have a quick meeting. You can identify an open room and book it directly on the RoomWizard. So, you don't have to open your laptop again."

Find out more about RoomWizard.

Featured Product

RoomWizard

Steelcase

© 1996 - 2021 Steelcase Inc. is the global leader in office furniture, interior architecture and space solutions for offices, hospitals and classrooms. Our furniture is inspired by innovative research in workspace design.