

## BRANDED ENVIRONMENTS



## Your workspace amplifies or subtracts from your brand - which is it?

Success with business development isn't just about having a compelling product, the right HR and the right tools in place. Physical environment is also a factor that deserves careful consideration.

There are some agency offices you go into that look tired and unloved. Our experience with Blossom, a new business recruitment and training consultancy, is that candidates, much as you'd expect, look for vibes and first impressions. They need to feel the company is going somewhere - and this is emotional, rather than intellectual - a gut feel about the potential success of this place of business as a career destination.

For prospective clients, the office environment from location and exterior context, to reception, working spaces and meeting rooms needs to accurately reflect the brand values. This is much more of an intellectual/aesthetic thing. Does it all add up? Some agencies have elegant, timeless interiors with wood panelling - suggestive of consultancy. There are homely ones with log fires and café receptions promoting down-to-earthness; cutting-edge with a caravan, cool with distressed concrete, insightful with a living room, and low overhead with a basic industrial park effect. It doesn't matter what the environment is, so long as it amplifies the brand's values and correctly conveys the positioning and the culture. If it's at odds, something will not seem right, unbalanced, and perhaps untrustworthy.

For current clients and staff, they need to see that things are evolving. If the environment hasn't changed much in ten years, it suggests the offer hasn't changed much for ten years - that the company is out of touch and/or process-driven. And so there needs to be a sense of renewal and of communication coming from the essential work and meeting spaces.

For suppliers visiting, and even more so for those actually working in your office (IT consultants, admin temps etc.), if they feel they're in a nice place to work they'll commit more and so deliver more.

Where potential investors, banks, partners and buyers are concerned, a typical scenario is a last minute, panicky spruce-up of the interior before they arrive to inspect your operation personally. Yes of course the only thing that matters is the balance sheet, but this group can be easily spooked. When the mind is tuned to pick up the most sensitive of signals concerning the right thing to do with a sizeable commercial commitment, the most seemingly insignificant things can set distant alarm bells ringing or help confirm positive feelings.

Agencies spend painful amounts of time and money agonising over corporate brochures, but forget the pivotal impact of their physical surroundings. Interiors are full of opportunities to display thought-leadership pieces, client work, statements about your positioning, values and mission, your awards, prominent PR, and also lifestyle, community boards and socially themed areas for expressing and amplifying your culture. Many of the most rapidly growing agencies are adept at aligning all actions, including communications, internally and externally, with their ethos. This extends to their business spaces too.

Every surface, every item and every space it sits in is an opportunity to say something positive and accurate about your business - don't waste this free media.

The image above is an interior design sketch by Florence Knoll of Hans Knoll's office, Madison Ave, NYC, 1950. She changed the way American office interiors look and function. Studying at Cranbrook, the Architectural Assoc. London and Illinois Inst. of Tech. under Mies van der Rohe, by 1946 she had met and married Hans Knoll. They developed Knoll Furniture, internationally renowned for its modern furnishings and interior designs.