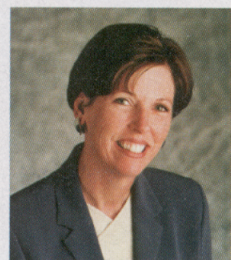




THE ROOM: Part Two

SHHHH, WE'RE IN A COLLABORATION

Lisa Perrine doesn't just design meeting rooms, she creates 'collaboration spaces'



Lisa Perrine

When Lisa Perrine designs a conference room, she doesn't just create a place with nice furniture where people can talk — she creates "collaboration spaces," where people can do their jobs better, faster and easier.

"My mission in life is to save talented people from wasting their time in meetings," says Perrine, who is president of Santa Ana, Calif.-based Cibola Systems, a full-service design and integration firm that serves the legal, medical, media and financial industries. It is Perrine's belief that intelligently designed meeting spaces can save people both time and money, and that quick, effective meetings are key to sustaining an energized, productive workforce.

"A company's most valuable asset is the time of its most talented people," says Perrine. "Top business professionals spend nearly 50 percent of their working hours in meetings, so if you can shorten that time, and make those meetings more productive, you can create real value for a company."

Designing for different working styles

Toward that end, when Perrine is designing a room for a company, she takes into account the

way its staff members meet and work together. She spends a considerable amount of time in the beginning of the process listening to her clients talk about how they work, and from this input she creates a model that attempts to address the different ways in which the room will be used, and by whom.

"Some people communicate and learn visually, some verbally, some kinesthetically, and some are a combination of those," says Perrine. "It's important to take the learning and com-

munication styles of the people using the room into account, and incorporate into the room the tools people will need to exercise those different modes."

For example, Perrine likes to use oval- or egg-shaped seating arrangements because they encourage dialogue and interaction among individuals. "The traditional long, skinny conference table is horrible for meetings," she says. "People have to

lean forward to see each other, and the sightlines are awful, especially if videoconferencing or projection is involved."

To make a room collaboration-friendly, Perrine also feels it's important to avoid having windows that look out onto high-traffic areas, and to avoid as many other distractions as possible — sun glare, ambient noise, shiny surfaces, people walking by, etc. The idea is to create an energizing space that makes people want to start exchanging ideas and getting things done, and to have this happen "organically" in a way that allows the energy of the people in the room and the room itself to work together and complement each other.

Choosing the right technology

Technology plays a key role in Perrine's thinking about room design because so many factors are dictated by the technology being used. But technology for technology's sake is useless, she says. It has to be used for the right purposes, in ways that mesh well with the working style of the group.

"The new technologies allow people to be more collaborative in many different ways," says Perrine, so she sees it as part of her job to guide clients to the technologies that will best serve them. "We design for collaboration, but sometimes people don't even know how they might use something like videoconferencing."

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Whether it's a large hall or small meeting space, Lisa Perrine's room designs encourage communication and interaction.

BY Tad Simons



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COLLABORATION

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A few years ago, Perrine suggested to a law firm that it consider installing videoconferencing equipment to communicate with its other offices around the country and beyond. According to Perrine, the partners in the firm had a hard time at first visualizing how they would use the system, but once they had it, they were converts. "They didn't realize how valuable a tool it could be for recruiting around the world," recalls Perrine, "and it has been an enormously effective tool for them in terms of developing case strategies on a collaborative basis through lawyers in different offices."

Designing for success

Indeed, high-tech meeting tools such as interactive whiteboards, plasma displays, data projectors and the like are making it possible for people to work together in ways that didn't even exist as recently as 10 years ago. Inasmuch as the fully wired conference room has helped create more collaboration-friendly environments, however, the technology itself also presents a number of design challenges that must be considered if the room is going to work effectively.

Lighting, for example, is a critical consideration, particularly if videoconferencing is being used. If images are to be projected on a screen as part of the videoconference, creating flexible lighting and choosing the best means of projection are key. (Perrine prefers rear-projection because it allows for

more ambient light.) If screens are used, they must be high enough so that other people's heads don't get in the way, and microphones need to be placed carefully so they don't pick up distracting table noise such as shuffling papers and clicking pens.

Whether the room is outfitted with the latest interactive plasma display or a paper flip chart, however, the technology in rooms that Perrine designs exists to support the meeting, not the other way around. In well-designed collaboration spaces, the tools are there for team members to do their jobs better and faster. Technology can't solve every problem, Perrine says, but if the space where a meeting takes place makes it possible for shorter, more productive meetings, "that leaves more time to solve other problems." ■

Tad Simons is editor-in-chief of Presentations.

Pleasures of PLASMA



Although electronic whiteboard technology has been around for years, PolyVision Corp. has announced new upgrade kits that convert high-resolution plasma displays into interactive computer monitors with laser-tracked cursor systems. The upgrade kit maintains the clarity of the plasma because the system requires no overlay to cloud image quality. Also, the laser tracking system is designed to precisely capture notes and drawings made using the electronic stylus.

The three new PolyVision models are: the 9042-NA, which works with the 42-inch NEC PlasmaSync 42MP2; the 9050-NA, which attaches to the 50-inch NEC PlasmaSync 50MPI; and the 9050-M, which supports the 50-inch Panasonic TH-50PHD3U display. ■ Wayne Kawamoto

PRICES: 9042-NA, \$3,795; 9050-NA, \$4,395; 9050-M, \$4,395.

CONTACT: Polyvision Corp., 800.631.4514.

www.polyvision.com.

CIRCLE 308 ON READER INQUIRY CARD

SMART furniture

To include all that clever collaboration technology in a room without junking it up with wires is a challenge Smart Technologies is tackling. The company's Smart Expression IM integration modules offer collaboration flexibility built right into custom-designed office furniture.

The company's multimedia-enabled cabinets, tables and desks let people work seamlessly with multimedia, without having to worry about the equipment. Furniture incorporating Smart Expression modules can have peripheral and laptop



support, a control panel that offers audio and input control, and a connection panel that supports integrated peripherals such as interactive whiteboards, projectors, external audio systems, VCRs, DVD players, document cameras or print-

ers. Users can choose the multimedia tools they want so everything is wired and ready to go at the flip of a switch.

Regis University, a liberal arts college in Denver has had success with four mobile Smart Expression 303 multimedia cabinets. "One of the best features of the Expression cabinet is the security it offers," says Michael Holmes, director of instructional support services. "We wanted a multimedia cabinet we could lock up to prevent students from removing or abusing the equipment inside." The cabinet has two locks, one on the main cabinet door and a second on the projector-mirror flap. ■ W.K.

PRICES: Smart Expression 303, \$2,499; Smart Expression 503 (pictured), \$4,999. CONTACT: Smart Technologies, 888.427.6278, www.smarttech.com.

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