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Creative Workplace Happier Workers
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TAMPA - Moti Sawh is convinced.

The senior project manager for Nielsen Media Research didn't know what to expect for himself and his team when they moved into Nielsen's brand-new Oldsmar campus two years ago. The 610,000-square-foot campus on Booker Creek Boulevard didn't have cubicles. It didn't have corner offices. It provided lots of room for meetings and collaboration, but not much space for each individual worker.

"When we first came into it, we had reservations," Sawh said. "It took some getting used to, initially."

Today, Sawh and his team say they love their new home. Sawh said it's easy to gather members of his work team together for impromptu meetings. Dave Gray, a database administrator, said he enjoys the building's massive windows and natural light. Paula Alvarez, also a database administrator, said the building seems cleaner than other places she's worked, and she believes there are fewer sick workers as a result. Senior database administrator Paul Richardson says the layout of the office space boosts the team's camaraderie.

"It's a treat to be in a building like this," Sawh said.

It's no accident that Sawh and other Nielsen employees feel happier and more productive these days. In fact, it's entirely by design.

Nielsen and other employers are discovering the benefits that good architecture and interior design can bring to the workplace - and, in a very real way, to the bottom line.

"Good design creates a better work space, and that's just better business," said Mickey Jacob, founding partner and director of business development for Tampa-based Urban Studio Architects. "It can give you a competitive edge, and it can also help the performance of your people."

Just as important: good design doesn't have to be expensive, Jacob said.

"Good design doesn't cost any more to implement," he said. "It's about creating an environment. It's more about thought than about cost."

Albert Alfonso, president of Alfonso Architects in Ybor City, said good architecture can help companies recruit, retain and motivate employees.

"If you can raise the morale of people working with the architecture, they'll feel like you've done something for them. They're going to perform harder. They're going to be proud of where they work."

Alfonso, who designed the Nielsen campus in Oldsmar, said good design is based on how companies and their employees function - it shouldn't just be art for art's sake.

What's true in fashion is true in architecture and interior design, he said.

"When you go buy a suit that's just kind of sitting on the rack, and it's not custom designed for you, it just doesn't feel right. Then you go to a tailor who designs a suit that fits you perfectly, and it's a whole different feel. It performs better," he said.

Rick Brenner, a workplace performance expert, says poor design and architecture can hurt a company's bottom line, especially if the workplace exposes employees to interruptions and disruptions.

Brenner, principal of Chaco Canyon Consulting in Cambridge, Mass., said open floor plans might be suitable for some kinds of work, while private offices might be better for other tasks.

"The architecture should fit the application," he said.

Company leaders should look at smart design as an investment that will pay off in higher profits and productivity.

"They don't get to decide whether they spend that money - it's going to get spent," he said. The question: "Do I spend the money on offices, or do I spend it on fixing all the defects, and losing market share, because of all the bad work people did because they were sitting in cubicles?"

Back at the Nielsen campus in Oldsmar, the forethought put into design is obvious: 15-foot-tall windows with motorized shades allow in daylight but cut down on glare. Energetic color schemes and exciting artwork invigorate the workplace, while red paint leads staffers and guests to common areas such as restrooms. Employees needing a quiet place to talk will find several private phone booths in each work area. And teams are putting custom touches on their work spaces, giving common rooms custom names such as "The Twilight Zone" and "John Wilkes Booth."

Scott T. Springer, Nielsen Media Research's general manager of operations, said the company sought to do two things through design and architecture: first, to



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provide the best possible working environment for its employees; and, second, to show the company as a solid yet progressive organization.

For Nielsen, the \$123 million campus means better products at lower costs, with fewer delays, and with fewer defects, Springer said. It also means that its employees are happier, more loyal and communicate better with one another.

That's good business, he said.

"You can't separate the people from the bottom line," he said.

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