



By TERESA Y. WARREN
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When the partners of the San Diego law office of **Best Best & Krieger** began planning their firm's new office space in Broadway 655, they chose not to think like lawyers. Lawyers typically approach space planning with traditional standards: big offices for partners; smaller offices for associates; one grand conference room with several small ones tucked into the corners; and no consideration to ratio and profitability models.

But in this case, the firm's design team -- made up of Best Best & Krieger partners, the firm's administrator and space designers Howard Sneed -- borrowed a high-tech approach to their design. Given the costs and complexities of designing and building out Class A office space, undoubtedly others will follow.

High-tech firms emphasize maximizing space and minimizing costs. The ratio of employees utilizing the space and the square footage per employee versus cost and profitability are analyzed. More open spaces are created with workstations and cubicles that take less space and also cost less. The design de-emphasizes the individual offices and instead focuses on common areas.

Law firms, on the other hand, typically design their space for the comfort and benefit of the senior attorneys. The individual offices

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Maximizing Class A space



Best Best & Krieger's law office design de-emphasizes individual offices and focuses on common

are big and feature expensive furniture and accessories. The reception areas are nicely decorated. Less emphasis is given to the conference areas that clients use or the workstations for the non-legal staff.

Instead of traditional cherry wood desks and dark, paneled hallways, Best Best & Krieger chose a "warm industrial" design. The ceilings are left open with the pipes and ducts exposed, the shell walls are unfinished and the materials utilized are simple.

One of the most untraditional aspects of the design is that the private offices for senior partners and junior associates are each allocated the same amount of office space. Non-attorney staff has systems furniture and workstations. The common areas, such as the

five conferences rooms and the employee lunch room/lounge, were allocated the greatest amount of space under the theory that they will get the most use.

"We set out to design a space that would maximize our profitability and yet would be comfortable for all of our employees and our clients," said Shawn Hagerty, managing partner of the San Diego office of Best Best & Krieger. "We view ourselves as a different kind of law firm so taking a different approach to our new space wasn't uncomfortable for us."

Best Best & Krieger's San Diego office is one of eight for the firm throughout California. The local office is full service with an emphasis on representing public

agencies -- one of the largest such practice in the region.

"I think what Best Best & Krieger did makes perfect sense," said developer **Todd Anson**. "A firm needs to consider what's more important - a big desk or profitability? It's absolutely what every firm should do."

Anson, who is a managing member of **Cisterra Partners**, is currently building Class A **DiamondView Tower** directly next to Petco Park and recently completed the Biogen Idec research and corporate campus in UTC.

In all, the Best Best & Krieger office has approximately 18,000 square feet of usable space. The firm built out 40 private offices to reflect their projected growth into 2008 and there is an option for a second floor. Currently, Best Best & Krieger has 27 attorneys in San Diego - up from 22 when they moved into the space last October.

"Technology allows attorneys to be more portable so they can be out of the office more," Anson said. "Their office designs should be 'low ego.'"

"Our design allocates about 450 square feet of usable space per attorney, which we believe is among the lowest in San Diego," Hagerty said.

"In our 18 years in the design business, we have never designed a law firm with all offices the same size," said Ann Sneed, a partner with Howard Sneed. "It's a very aggressive planning strategy that gave Best Best & Krieger huge flexibility and as much as 25 percent more efficient space."

With the cost to build out new construction in a Class A building ranging from \$60 to \$100 per square foot, designers must approach their task carefully and creatively. Among the many design features

that Howard Sneed included to maximize space and decrease costs are the private offices' "barn doors."

Instead of traditional swinging doors, these doors slide along the exterior hallway, saving about 9 square feet per door. All of the furniture is modular, which saves money, space and adds to the industrial look. Cost effective, eco-friendly materials were also used, including wood floors in the reception area and conference areas made from recycled railroad ties.

"One of the biggest challenges in designing offices in Class A buildings is conforming to the codes and building department regulations while planning space that is open and bright and without unusual corners that block daylight," Sneed said.

The Best Best & Krieger team overcame that challenge and their offices have good flow and according to Sneed. "There are no corners and or long hallways that aren't utilized," she said.

"The response from our clients has been very positive," Hagerty said. "Because we emphasized comfort in our common areas - the areas clients use - our clients, who are also cost effective, appreciate the thought that went into our offices."

Warren is a principal with TW2 Marketing and works with law and real estate firms.