



When 500 office employees were asked whether they liked plants around them, 87% said “Yes.” (HEALTHY GROWTH survey in Ireland, Belgium and the Netherlands).

Why then do so few companies invest in a green office? Mainly because they are unaware of the positive return on investments. Discover with us how investing \$36,000 can lead to annual savings of \$33,350.

The Big, Leafy Idea

In 1999, the Sutter Verlag contact center in Germany decided to create a “green” working environment for their staff. By green, we do not mean environmentally friendly (although it was). Instead, the contact center was densely distributed with live plants. While many contact centers have plants, they are mostly for decoration. The difference here was the density of plant life in the contact center, which included small plants at every workstation and larger plants located in the immediate vicinity for every 4-5 positions.

The hope in doing so was that the plants would reduce stress in the office and provide some benefit to lower absenteeism and turnover. Did it work?



How Green Makes Green

After 6 months already the plant life gave spectacular results, but for a list of reasons far greater than originally anticipated. Here are some of the benefits that were identified:

- Plants at workstations provide a focal point away from computer screens for agents. These focal points proved calming and relaxing, reducing stress.
- Plants also absorb noise. While workstations may include some sound dampening materials, plants further reduce noise providing the ability to focus better. Lower noise also provided a calming effect on agents.
- Plant life reduced the number of harmful elements in the air. Contact centers are mostly about talking. Talking causes germs to spread significantly through the air. Plants absorb some of these elements, making the air cleaner and freer of potentially harmful germs.
- Plants absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen. This increases the amount of fresh air in the center, helping people feel fresher as well.
- Plants, upon releasing oxygen, also release moisture. The moisture level of the contact center increased noticeably, reducing health issues related to sickness such as dry nasal passages. It is important that a plants maintenance company keeps control of the appropriate moisture level.
- It is also important that employees have the freedom to make their individual choice out of a number of carefully selected plants.

The bottom line is that the high-density plant design improved the health and motivation levels of staff, while reducing stress. Absenteeism due to illness was reduced by more than 50% , and staff turnover fell dramatically. In fact the first two years after the introduction of the plants, nobody resigned from the center out of their free will, management themselves had to dismiss some staff members. Even more significant is that the positive trend in reduced absenteeism was sustained through the years.

Living Plants, Your Natural ROI

Running the Numbers

The two key areas of savings included in the assessment are attendance and turnover. Attendance savings result in the reduction of paid absence time. Most companies have policies that allow up to ten days per year of paid absence time. Turnover reduction results from the fewer number of people terminated for attendance issues as well as a reduction in voluntary departures when agents seek a healthier work environment.



The following is a simple assessment that can be used to determine the net savings resulting from high-density plant environments. This form can be used for your specific contact center by substituting the appropriate numbers for your environment.

Category/Assumption	Base Case	High Density Plant Design
Avg. work days on site/yr ¹	235	235
Avg. annual paid absence	3.50%	1.75%
Avg. days paid absence/yr	8.22	4.11
Annual loaded cost of Labor ²	\$31,200	\$31,200
Daily loaded cost of labor ³	\$120.00	\$120.00
Annual paid absence cost	\$987	\$493.50
Number of Agents	100	100
Annual cost of absence	\$98,700	\$49,350
Annual attendance savings	\$49,350	
Annual Turnover ⁴	50%	45%
Number of Turned Headcount	50	45
Cost of Turnover/Headcount ⁵	\$4,000	\$4,000
Annual Cost of Turnover	\$200,000	\$180,000
Annual turnover savings	\$20,000	
Annual Absence/Turnover Savings	\$69,350	
Cost of High-Density Plants	\$36,000	
Net Annual Savings	\$33,350	
Annual Savings per Headcount	\$333.50	

¹ Average work days on site per year based on 260 work days (same basis for calculating daily loaded cost of labor) less 10 days for vacation, 10 days for holidays and 5 floating days.

² Annual loaded cost of labor assumes an hourly rate of \$12 (including seniority) and a 25% benefit load.

³ Daily loaded cost of labor is equal to the annual loaded cost of labor divided by 260 paid days per year (52 weeks times 5 days per week).

⁴ Annual turnover is a contact center industry average.

⁵ Annual cost of turnover is an industry average that includes per new hire cost for advertising (\$100), hiring and testing (\$200), training (\$1,800) and lost productivity (\$1,900)

Additional benefits of productivity, increased sales and the like can be added to your individual analysis.

If you are running a staff intensive organization, you can also benefit from a living plants approach.
Talk to us to find out how.

If you are still in doubt and look for more hard facts, read “The Green BMW” paper.

(This article was originally published in the US and written with our partner Destex, an expert in contact center solutions.)

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