



# An architect's ideas on using facility space and saving money

by James M. Connolly

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Whether it's for new facilities or renovations on existing properties, New England companies — tech companies in particular — are asking for more help from architects in getting more for less. Daniel P. Perruzzi, Jr., AIA, LEED AP principal at Boston firm Margulies Perruzzi Architects, said in a recent interview that clients are making sometimes unusual requests of architects in light of a down economy and in changes on the business and technology fronts. He shared his observations with Mass High Tech managing editor James M. Connolly.



Daniel P. Perruzzi, Jr., AIA, LEED AP  
Principal at Margulies Perruzzi Architects

## **Telecommuting**

“A lot of firms have become interested again. It comes up every few years, but more so this time. Telecommuting is where people are working for the company but not usually at the company premises. They have to figure out how much space to allow for when those employees are in the office. They ask, ‘Do I go with a 1-to-3 ratio or maybe a 1-to-5 ratio’ of workstations to employees. ... A lot of companies are saying that if you’re telecommuting, you’re telecommuting all the time. You can come in and sit in front of someone and have a conversation, but you’re not going to be working in the office.”

## **Workstations**

“There’s been pressure on the size of workstations over the years. The latest you see is a counter. It’s probably desksize, 30 inches deep, and five or six feet per person. The length depends on the number of people you want to squeeze in. We’re seeing rows of these workstations with people working in support of engineers who are in cubicles. The traditional workstation has power, phone and network cabling feeding through the panels. Those panels are expensive; a good, quality workstation can be \$4,000 to \$6,000. A dumb workstation with only one feed coming through may cost only \$1,000 a seat.”

## **Managing costs**

“We have been working really hard with tenants to fine-tune their finish selections. You can add a whole lot of cost without really trying by not selecting finishes carefully. So we are attaching costs at the very early stages for each design element: tiles, paint, carpets, wall coverings. Lighting is a big-cost item, not only in power over the term of the lease but in the fixture itself.”

“The real challenge is that many companies want cool space, but they don’t have a lot of money. So what you can do is work with shapes and colors, generally trying to insert an element of surprise. You might see a curved wall where you wouldn’t expect it. Or everything might be a medium color but you walk into one area with bright colors. A (gypsum) board wall that’s set at an angle costs the same as a square one. Color is the same way — you can do great stuff just by sharpening up the color palette without adding cost.”

### **Negotiations**

“The traditional deal has been that you find the space you are interested in, and the landlord quotes you a rent rate and will give you a certain amount of money in fit-up costs. Now we are hearing about tenants going to the landlord and saying they want a turnkey cost where they pay for the fit-up over the course of the lease. All of these tenants are focused on cash and want to retain as much cash as possible.”

### **Green buildings**

“High-tech companies, more than any other type of client we work with, expect their spaces to be green. They will reduce the size of their cubicles, but they won’t give up on sustainability.”

### **Greenbacks**

“By being green, you can reduce your overall energy usage and your lost productivity time in terms of people being out sick. I can’t prove it myself, but there is strong data out there that you will have a more productive work force if you provide them with a green work environment.”

### **Reality check**

“I think people have the sense that because everyone is so hungry for work that they can get it done much faster and cheaper than ever. I’m always throwing out a word of caution. Some people have unrealistic ideas about what they can get for construction costs. Commodity prices really haven’t come down that much, and the labor is pretty much fixed. Maybe you can do a little better on price, but you’re not going to cut your costs in half.”

### **What’s out**

“I’m seeing a lot of companies compromising on audiovisual systems. That stuff really adds up fast. Another thing we’re seeing less of, thinking back a couple of years: Lots of companies were thinking about disaster recovery. I haven’t heard anyone talk about that in well over a year. Everyone is more worried about this disaster of an economy.”

### **What to think about**

- Do your telecommuters really need in-office space too?
- Weigh costs and options for finish work early in the design process
- Do more with zero cost elements such as different paint colors