



Visioning and Resource Assessment: Vital Tools in Pre-Planning Your Office Design Project

By Paul Battista, Battista Design Group



For many patients, visiting a healthcare provider can be an emotion-filled experience, with feelings ranging from nervousness to apprehension. But your facility can set the stage for your patients' experience. The atmosphere your patients encounter upon stepping through the door can go a long way toward putting them at ease and the right ambiance will compliment your caring professional services. The physical surroundings of your office can influence the perception of the quality of your care and the value of your practice.

So, what do you want your space to say about your practice? By working with a qualified and experienced architect, you can make your practice more efficient, beautiful, profitable, and ultimately more valuable, projecting a caring image and creating a positive experience for your patients. To get started, you will want to consider the overall design of your space, the functional needs and possibilities, the essence you want to project. These things, of course, must be balanced with available resources (your budget and physical space).

Visioning Your Project

When you first meet with an architect, look for someone who begins by asking you to consider a few questions that will establish the vision for your planning.

- What is the current image of your practice?
- What is the personality of your practice?
- What image do you want to present?
- Who is your current or desired clientele?
- What is the character of the surrounding environment/neighborhood?
- How can you make your practice more efficient, profitable and valuable through design and space utilization?
- Is your current physical environment holding you back?
- Do you need or want to explore a new location?
- What are your goals for the short-term and long-term?

The answers to these questions will help establish a clear vision and inform all involved about the direction for your project. Once the architect understands your goals, they can share knowledge about current trends and design ideas to further help guide a plan for your office. This exchange of ideas and information is critical to the success of your project. For instance, more recent trends include carefully considering patient privacy and separation; topics that are more important due to



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changing patient requirements in an evolving treatment landscape. Specifically, many dental professionals are making virus-related updates.

“In our design concept discussions, I talked about ideas I have had for years regarding planning a clinic facility with the engineering controls to handle needs brought on by COVID-19 and make the job easier of keeping dental treatment rooms clean and safe on a daily basis,” said Dr. Larry O’Neill, of Running Creek Dental Center, Elizabeth, Colorado.

Choosing a New Space

Choosing a new office space is not dissimilar from choosing a new home. You have already spent so much time in the current space, a list of what is lacking can be easily created. So, you have your personal wish list. But with design in mind, what should you be looking for in a new space?

An experienced architect will tell you that relatively square or rectangular spaces are more desirable, while odd-shaped spaces can be less efficient and

more difficult to design and space plan. Ideally, the space should be mostly free of interior columns and other internal obstructions. And East or North facing windows work best for treatment room orientation, while South and West facing windows can make rooms extremely hot and uncomfortable. Of course, location and the corresponding demographics are often the most important factors -- are you geographically desirable to your target demographic -- and after that it is up to the design team to maximize the potential.

An architect’s primary responsibilities are first, to ask questions and listen to your responses. Second, to understand your goals, needs, vision and budget. And third to implement your goals and vision for your new office via the plans and design details.

Budget Planning

So, you have a vision and you have a canvas -- your space. The final part of planning is budgeting. Practice owners should be aware that construction cost is only a part of the total project cost. Other costs that must be considered are furniture, fixtures, new dental equipment, operating capital, financing costs, professional fees, marketing, etc.

People sometimes mistakenly think about construction costs as a fixed price that can just be named and then the office will be magically built for that price. But design drives the construction cost. As part of the planning conversation, an architect should get clarity on and have respect for your budget and design accordingly. You should also know realistically what you will get for your money. Costs will be based on the agreed upon design and, of course, the current construction market costs. With material and construction costs on the rise and lead times increasing, it is even more critical now that the design vs. budget discussion take place early in the process. For example, the price of lumber has nearly doubled over the past year. Other products such as doors and light fixtures lead times are increasing. It is more important than ever to start the planning process earlier for a new office project.

The physical location of your business -- the place where you deliver service -- is a critical component of your practice. When you are ready to invest in updating an existing space or designing a new one, make sure you have a partner who can interpret your vision, share information about the state of the art, and deliver a beautiful and functional space that meets all of your needs and expectations -- as well as those of your patients. ■

About the Author

Mr. Paul Battista is a licensed architect with more than 30 years of experience in specialty architecture and design in gaming and hospitality, retail, restaurant, and corporate offices. He also is one of the most highly regarded medical and dental Office architects in Colorado. Over the past 18 years, he has made dental office and dental specialty office architecture and design his emphasis.

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