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Bars are a bonus for businesses

UK businesses are adding office bars at a rapid pace.

“UK businesses are three times as likely to specify a bar in an office redesign as they were in 2000” says Sarah Kay, Principal of Corporate Interiors at Woods Bagot architecture practice. In the past, businesses relied on pay, benefits and pension schemes to attract new employees; now, however, more and more UK firms are looking to workplace lounges and bars to engage younger, creative workers and clients.

Sarah Kay explains: “UK offices are competing to recruit savvy “creatives” in a booming economy. Many of those entering the world of work for the first time have never endured a depressed job market and as a result, young professionals are becoming increasingly picky in their choice of workplace.

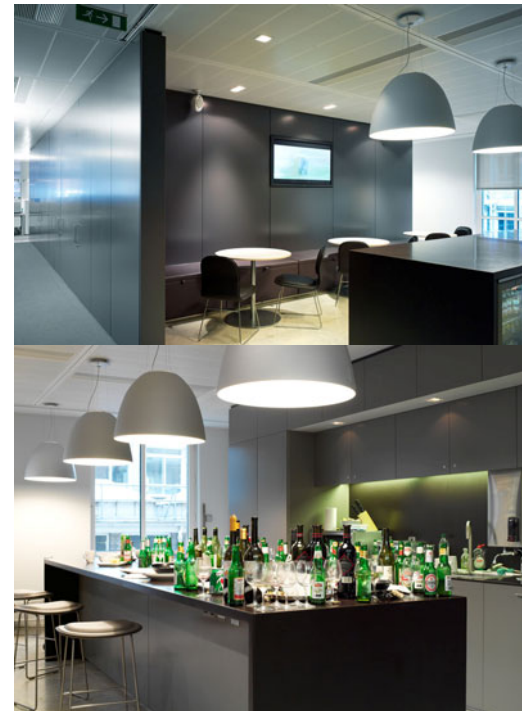
“Young knowledge-workers want more from their office environments; bars and the type of interaction they promote are perks which bring teams together, thus making them more valuable than bonuses or freebies.”

Workplace bonding over a drink or cup of espresso towards the end of the week is gaining in popularity, particularly with the new generation of young professionals. In a wave of demand for relaxed working environments, businesses are looking to social areas and events to attract the brightest talent.

Staff believe that Friday night drinks are a reward for a job well done; it's not simply a drinks trolley, which might be seen as a 'hand out'. Workers appreciate getting away from their desks to an area where they can drink and socialise. Having drinks in the office rather than the pub is more inclusive and colleagues are more likely to stay focussed on work-related issues.

In a recent research paper for Woods Bagot on “interaction in the workplace”, Sean Coward commented: “Employees who consider themselves as part of a collective enterprise increase their individual efforts, resulting in optimal team outcomes”. Coward believes the key to a successful workplace is “to create a culture that encourages and supports positive collaborative relationships among its members”, and the provision of a bar is certainly a way of establishing this interactive office culture.

Julian Hough, Group Development Director at The Engine Group, said: “We do not regard our bar as a cost; we see it as an investment. It's a great place for informal meetings and staff briefings. Then there are the quiz nights and karaoke nights - a great way of creating a real social buzz.”



Sarah Kay added: “The office is the most-powerful communication tool wielded by any organisation. Adding a space that can be used as a bar shows employees and potential recruits that a business is committed to their happiness and enjoyment. Engaging with workers is a key responsibility of every workplace. Businesses are gaining competitive HR advantage by adding bars and lounges, and these spaces often double as client entertainment areas when not being used by staff.”

Gary Williams, Group PR Manager at EC Harris, said: “We do things differently at EC Harris, we are not a traditional surveying firm. We are always looking at new ways of working and bringing our people together. Our new London office, ECHQ, supports the kind of interaction that we as a business are looking for and the bar is one part of this approach. The whole ethos of the building is to get people to work together and the bar is playing its part in this. On one level, it has been invaluable in enabling our Partners to get to know more people, such as graduates and new recruits.”

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About Woods Bagot

International design practice, **Woods Bagot** provides its clients with innovative design solutions that are both functional and inspiring. This is demonstrated by the successful delivery of a range of high profile projects within the commercial workplace, hospitality, mixed-use, education and science sectors.

Established in 2001, Woods Bagot’s London studio has a dynamic team of 85 professionals. Since its inception, its young, integrated team has developed a diverse portfolio of significant projects including:

- Ducie Street Tower, Manchester
- Liverpool Central Village
- Multiplex headquarters, London
- Rolls building, London
- Eversheds LLP new London headquarters

About research

* With reference to studies by Karau & Williams (1997), and Ellemers, de Gilder & Haslam (2004)