Benching

Q1. What is benching and how does it differ from traditional workstations?

A: Benching is a long, shared desk surface (the 'bench') that multiple workers use side-by-side without individual cube partitions. Unlike traditional workstations with high panel walls creating semi-private offices, benching is open and low-profile. The key benefits: significantly lower cost per workstation, higher space density (more people per square foot), a collaborative and open feel, and easy reconfiguration. The trade-off: less acoustic privacy, limited personal storage at the workstation, and a one-size-fits-all approach to the work surface.

Q2. What is a typical bench run configuration?

A: A bench run consists of workstations sharing a continuous surface or a series of connected panels. Typical configurations: back-to-back (two rows of workers facing away from each other across a shared spine), face-to-face (workers facing each other across the bench), and single-sided (all workers facing the same direction). Back-to-back configurations are most common for open-plan offices — they maximize density while keeping wire management in a central spine. Widths range from 24" to 36" per person, with 30" being the most common standard.

Q3. What's the typical linear footage per person in benching?

A: Industry standard is 5-6 linear feet per person (60-72"). At 60" per person, teams fit efficiently while each person has adequate elbow room and screen space. Some ultra-dense hot-desking setups go as low as 48" per person, but below 60" starts to feel cramped for full-day workers. For leadership or senior staff who work at a bench, 66-72" per person is more appropriate. Never spec bench widths purely on density targets without considering the human comfort factor.

Q4. What's the difference between benching with screens and without?

A: Screens (privacy panels) can be added to benching at various heights. No screens: fully open, maximum visibility and collaboration feel. Low screens (12-18"): minimal visual separation, some sense of space ownership, looks intentional. Mid-height screens (24-42"): moderate visual privacy, still feels open, most popular in contemporary offices. Full-height screens (60"+): approaches traditional panel system territory. Acoustics, brand culture, and space feel all influence the right screen height decision. Many organizations use no screens or low screens for collaborative culture and add acoustic ceiling baffles to manage sound.

Q5. How is power and data managed in benching systems?

A: Power and data management is one of the most important specification elements in benching. Options: in-furniture power raceways (hardwired power strip running through the desk structure — cleanest but requires licensed electrician), above-surface power units (plug-in units that sit on or attach to the desk surface — flexible but visible), and floor-mount power poles or floor boxes (power comes up from the floor — clean look but requires floor core drilling). For any benching installation, plan the power and data infrastructure early — it often involves contractor coordination.

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Q6. Can benching support sit-stand heights?

A: Yes. Sit-stand benching is a growing category. Options: individually motorized legs per station (most ergonomically correct — each person sets their own height), fixed sit-stand height (all stations preset to a height between sitting and standing — uncomfortable for longer work periods), and hybrid configurations where some stations are fixed and some are adjustable. Individual motor per station is the right spec for any serious ergonomic sit-stand program. Whole-bench uniform height adjustment is a budget compromise.

Q7. How do I manage acoustic privacy in an open benching environment?

A: Benching creates acoustic challenges — there are no panel walls to absorb sound. Acoustic management strategies: ceiling acoustic baffles or clouds (absorb overhead sound reflections), privacy screens with acoustic fabric (low panels with sound-absorbing material), white noise/sound masking systems (raise the ambient sound floor to mask speech intelligibility), and thoughtful placement (don't put phone-heavy roles on open benching next to focused work roles). Budget for acoustic solutions alongside benching furniture — they're inseparable in practice.

Q8. What materials and finishes are common for benching systems?

A: Benching tops: high-pressure laminate (HPL) is standard and comes in dozens of colors and woodgrain patterns. Some premium systems offer solid surface or glass. Edge profiles vary from eased (contemporary) to bullnose (traditional) to knife-edge (modern minimal). Base structures: powder-coat steel frames are universal. Base colors can be specified (silver, white, black, and many others). Selecting coordinating base and top finishes is important for a cohesive designed look — don't mix tops and bases randomly.

Q9. What's the difference between benching and hoteling stations?

A: Benching typically refers to a fixed-assignment workstation system — each person has their bench position. Hoteling refers to unassigned workstations where employees reserve a desk as needed. Benching can be used as a hoteling infrastructure, but true hoteling systems also include a desk reservation technology platform and typically have personal storage elsewhere (day-use lockers). For organizations moving to activity-based work, planning the benching density and the associated locker/storage program together is important.

Q10. What is the installation process for a large benching program?

A: Benching is typically installed by the furniture dealer or an authorized installer, not self-assembled. A large benching program (50+ stations) can take 1-3 days. Sequence: electrical rough-in first, then benching frame, then surfaces and screens, then power and data connections, then monitors and accessories last. Coordinate with IT for data cabling installation timing. Have a clear site-ready checklist confirmed with the installer before the delivery date. Floors should be complete, HVAC operational, and sufficient lighting before benching installation.