



BUYER'S GUIDE

Cubicles & Workstations

Your Complete Guide to Choosing the Right Cubicle or Workstation System

Free Shipping

Free Lifetime Warranty

Lowest Price Guarantee

30+ Years Experience

Your complete guide to finding the right desk for less.

FREE SHIPPING

On qualifying orders — no freight surprises.

FREE LIFETIME WARRANTY

We stand behind every product we sell.

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEE

Found it cheaper? We'll beat it.

Shop desks at the lowest prices — free shipping on qualifying orders.

www.findofficefurniture.com

Call us: 1.866.409.0202

Cubicles Still Rule — Here's Why

Every few years, someone declares the cubicle dead. Open offices are the future. Benching is taking over. And yet — cubicle systems keep selling. Because the reality of most work environments is more nuanced than the trend pieces suggest.

Privacy matters. Focus work requires concentration. Not everyone thrives in a fully open office. Customer service teams on the phone all day need sound separation. HR departments require confidentiality. Medical facilities have HIPAA obligations. Call centers need noise management. For all of these use cases, panel-based workstations remain the right tool.

The cubicles of today aren't the soul-crushing fabric boxes of the 1990s either. Modern panel systems are elegant, reconfigurable, available in beautiful finishes and fabrics, and designed to balance privacy with collaboration in ways that the original systems never attempted.

This guide covers everything you need to know to spec the right cubicle or panel-based workstation system — from panel height to layout configurations to pre-owned options.

Panel-Based vs. Desk-Based Systems

There are two fundamentally different approaches to workstation systems, and understanding the difference saves you from buying the wrong thing:

Panel-Based Systems (Traditional Cubicles) — The workstation is built around the panels. Worksurfaces, pedestals, overhead storage, and shelving all attach to and are supported by the panel structure. The panels are structural. When you reconfigure the layout, you're reconfiguring the entire structural system. More expensive upfront, incredibly flexible in the long run, and delivers the highest degree of privacy. The panels do the heavy lifting (literally and figuratively).

Desk-Based Systems with Privacy Panels — A freestanding desk is the foundation; panels are added on top of or around the desk for privacy. The desk stands on its own; panels are accessories. Less flexible for reconfiguration than true panel systems, but easier to install and often more affordable. Common in environments where you want desk configurations with some privacy without committing to a full panel system.

Which is right for you? — If privacy and acoustic separation are critical, and you expect to reconfigure the layout over time, go panel-based. If you need a clean, professional-looking workstation setup with moderate privacy and a smaller budget, desk-based with add-on panels is a strong option.

Panel Heights — Privacy vs. Collaboration

Panel height is the biggest single decision in cubicle specification because it determines the entire character of the environment: how private it is, how collaborative it feels, and how it looks.

Low Panels (39"–42") — Seated users can see over the panels when standing but have privacy when seated. Creates an open, collaborative feel while providing enough separation to define individual workspaces. Popular in modern, collaborative offices. Doesn't block natural light. The office still feels open from a management perspective. Best for teams that communicate frequently.

Standard Panels (53"–65") — The classic cubicle height range. Seated users have full privacy; a standing user can see over the panel. Provides meaningful acoustic and visual separation. Balances privacy with manageability. The most common height range for general commercial use.

Full-Height Panels (67"–80"+) — Floor-to-ceiling or near-ceiling panels. Maximum privacy, maximum acoustic separation. Essentially a soft-wall private office. Used in call centers (for noise management), HR departments, financial services (for compliance and confidentiality), and healthcare settings. More expensive per linear foot and blocks natural light more significantly.

Mix of heights: — Many professional workstation installations use varying panel heights strategically — full-height on exterior walls and between aisles where sound travels, standard height between adjacent workstations within a team cluster, and lower panels at the entry to each station.

Configuration Types

The layout of your workstations determines how many people you fit in a space and how teams interact.

Straight (Single) Workstation — The simplest configuration: a single workstation with panels on three sides (or two sides against a wall). The entire work surface is on one side. Low space efficiency per seat but maximum simplicity.

L-Shaped Workstation — An L-shaped work surface within the cubicle footprint. More workspace for the user — a main desk surface plus a return for secondary tasks or additional monitors. The most common configuration for knowledge workers. Typically 8'x8' or 8'x10' in panel dimension.

U-Shaped Workstation — Three surfaces forming a U inside the cubicle. Maximum personal workspace. Used for power users — executives in panel environments, legal staff, engineers, and others who need substantial desk surface. Typically 10'x10' or larger.

Pod / Cluster Configurations — Groups of L or straight workstations arranged around a shared resource hub, facing outward or inward. Space-efficient for team groupings. The "pod" approach reduces aisle space by having multiple workstations share back panels.

Pinwheel Clusters — Four workstations arranged so each faces a different direction, sharing a central column. Very space-efficient. Works well for teams with low need for sightline contact between team members.

Fabric and Finish Options

Modern panel systems offer extensive customization. Here's what you're choosing:

Panel Fabrics — The soft surface on panel faces. Available in hundreds of colors, patterns, and textures. Tackable fabrics (which accept pushpins) are standard and practical for most office environments. Grade A fabrics are standard options; Grade B and C fabrics are upgrades that typically cost more.

Frame Finishes — The structural frame elements (top caps, trim pieces, connectors) are usually powder-coated in standard colors: gray, black, aluminum, white, and sometimes custom colors. Matching the frame finish to your other office furniture creates a cohesive look.

Laminate Worksurfaces — Work surfaces within panel systems are almost always laminate, available in the same color range as panel fabrics and trim. Consistency between surfaces and trim looks most professional.

Glass Panels — Premium panel systems offer glass insert options (framed clear or frosted glass) in upper panel sections. Allows light to pass through while maintaining acoustic separation. Significantly more expensive than standard fabric panels but creates a dramatically more open, modern feel in what would otherwise be a closed environment.

Powered Panels and Cable Management

Modern workstations are full of technology. Panels need to handle power and data:

Powered Panels — Many panel systems offer integrated power and data raceways built into the panel structure itself. Power feeds in from the base of the panel through a building connection; outlets are accessible from within each workstation. This is the cleanest possible cable management solution and is essentially standard in commercial panel systems.

Overhead Cable Management — Cables can also be managed in overhead channels that run the length of a panel run. Useful for data cables (network, USB) that don't need to be at desk height.

Grommets in Surfaces — Work surfaces have grommets for routing cables from the surface down through the panel structure. Essential for keeping cable clutter off the work surface.

Planning data density: — Know how many data drops you need per workstation before specifying. Typical knowledge workers need 1–2 data ports; heavy tech users may need 4+. Plan this before panels are installed — retrofitting data infrastructure in a panel system is painful.

Pre-Owned and Refurbished Options

This is where FOF really delivers value: pre-owned and refurbished panel systems.

Brand-new panel-based workstation systems from major manufacturers are expensive — often \$2,500–\$5,000+ per workstation fully configured. But the great news is that panel systems are built to last decades and reconfigure easily. A properly refurbished panel system looks excellent, works perfectly, and can cost 50–70% less than new.

What "refurbished" means at FOF: — Panels are cleaned, re-fabbed (new fabric applied), damaged components replaced, and missing pieces sourced from the same product line. You get a consistent,

professional-looking installation.

What to confirm when buying refurbished:

- Is the fabric new or cleaned original? (New fabric is strongly preferred)
- Are all components from the same product family? (Mixing generations can create height and connector compatibility issues)
- Are replacement components still available? (Important for future additions and repairs)
- Is electrical in working order? (Essential for powered panels)

Pre-owned cubicles are one of the best values in commercial office furniture. Call FOF at 1.866.409.0202 — we can match you with pre-owned systems that fit your layout and budget.

Installation Considerations

Unlike individual desks, full panel-based workstation systems require professional installation for anything beyond the smallest setups.

Why: — Panels connect to each other via frame connectors that require specific alignment. Powered panels need electrical connections made by a qualified technician. Getting a large installation right requires experience and the right tools.

DIY-friendly options: — Simpler desk-based systems with add-on panels are generally user-installable. Even some straightforward panel configurations can be managed by a capable facilities team with good instructions.

Professional installation timeline: — For large commercial installs (20+ workstations), allow 1–3 days of installation time per 20–30 workstations depending on complexity.

Space planning first: — Always produce a detailed floor plan before ordering. Measure the space carefully, account for column positions, entry doors, windows, HVAC registers, and electrical locations. Getting the layout right on paper before the truck arrives prevents expensive problems.

Budget Planning Per Station

\$500–\$1,500 per station (pre-owned/refurbished) — Re-furbished panel systems from major manufacturers. Full L-shaped configurations, new fabric, working powered panels. Excellent value for budget-conscious buyers who need real workstation privacy. FOF specializes in this category.

\$1,500–\$3,000 per station (new, standard) — New entry-level to mid-tier panel systems. Solid construction, standard fabric/finish options, basic powered panel options. Good for most commercial environments.

\$3,000–\$5,000 per station (new, premium) — Premium new systems from top-tier manufacturers (Herman Miller, Steelcase, Haworth). Full customization, best acoustic performance, maximum reconfigurability. Used in Fortune 500 environments.

\$5,000+ per station — High-end architectural panel systems, glass walls, full private offices within panel systems. Custom corporate installations.

FOF's advantage: We source commercial-grade systems (including the same brands used in top corporate environments) at prices that make professional workstation installations accessible to mid-size businesses. Call 1.866.409.0202 and tell us your seat count and budget — we'll design a layout and quote it out.

Quick-Buy Checklist

Before you commit:

- System type: Panel-based or desk-based with panel accessories?
- Panel height: Low (39"–42"), standard (53"–65"), or full height (67"+)?
- Configuration: Straight, L-shape, U-shape, pod, or mixed?
- Fabric and finish: Colors and patterns selected?
- Glass panels: Premium upgrade for light and modern feel?
- Powered panels: Integrated power raceways included?
- Data density: How many network drops per station?
- New vs. refurbished: New for full customization or refurbished for value?
- Installation: Professional install needed? Timeline coordinated?
- Layout plan: Detailed floor plan produced before ordering?
- Budget per station: Target tier identified?
- Warranty: FOF free lifetime warranty on qualifying products.