
Cubicles & Workstations

Q1. What's the difference between cubicles and open-plan workstations?

A: Cubicles use panels (typically 48-66" tall) to create semi-enclosed individual spaces, providing acoustic separation and visual privacy. Open-plan workstations use lower screens (12-42") or no screens at all, emphasizing collaboration and visual connection. Cubicles are better for focused, individual work. Open-plan workstations are better for collaborative, team-oriented work. Most modern offices use a hybrid: a mix of focused cubicle-style spaces and open collaborative zones. Neither extreme works for everyone — understand the work model before recommending.

Q2. What are standard cubicle panel heights and what do they achieve?

A: 42": Low — provides storage and surface definition with minimal visual separation. Standing workers can see over. Modern, open feel. 48-54": Mid-height — seated privacy from neighbors, standing workers can see over. Good balance of openness and focus. 66-72": Full height — standing privacy, strong acoustic separation, approaches the feel of a private office. Older traditional corporate style. For most modern offices, 42-48" panels strike the right balance between collaboration and focus. 66"+ panels feel dated and create a 'maze' effect in the floor plan.

Q3. What components make up a workstation?

A: A complete workstation typically includes: panels (the walls), work surface (desk), corner piece (if L-shaped), overhead storage bin or shelf, file drawer (mobile pedestal or fixed), task chair, and power/data distribution through the panel system. The 'shell' price typically refers to panels and surfaces; components like storage and chairs are often priced separately. When comparing workstation quotes, make sure you're comparing apples to apples — identical component lists.

Q4. How much space does a cubicle take up?

A: Common configurations: 6'x6' (36 sq ft) — compact, efficient, common for clerical roles. 6'x8' (48 sq ft) — comfortable standard for most office workers. 8'x8' (64 sq ft) — spacious, appropriate for senior staff or roles requiring large work surfaces. 8'x10' or larger — near-office territory, often used for supervisors. Plan for traffic aisles of at least 36" (42" for primary aisles). Also add corridor space around the perimeter of the cube farm. Total floor plan consumption is typically 60-90 sq ft per workstation when aisles are included.

Q5. What's the difference between new workstations and remanufactured/refurbished?

A: New workstations are manufactured fresh with current fabrics, finishes, and hardware. Remanufactured workstations are used panels that have been stripped, refinished, reupholstered, and rebuilt to like-new specification — often at 40-60% of new pricing. Refurbished workstations are cleaned and repaired but not fully rebuilt. Remanufactured is often the best value: new aesthetics and function at significantly lower cost. The trade-offs: lead times are sometimes longer for remanufactured (depends on the source), and future expandability requires matching the same used system.

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Q6. How does power get into a workstation?

A: Panel systems have built-in electrical raceways in the panel cores. Power feeds from a wall or floor outlet into the panel system, which distributes to each workstation via panel connections. This is the cleanest approach. Alternatively, power poles from the ceiling or floor poke-through boxes in the floor feed free-standing furniture. For any cubicle program, coordinate the electrical design with a licensed electrician early — the electrical infrastructure must be in place before panels are installed.

Q7. Can I add panels or workstations after the initial installation?

A: Yes, but with caveats. Cubicle panel systems are designed to be addable — you can typically add panels, surfaces, and storage to an installed system. But additions must match the existing product line and generation. Panel systems change generations every 5-10 years; adding panels from a different generation to an existing installation creates visual and mechanical mismatches. The most future-proof approach: choose a current-generation system from a manufacturer with a long track record, and document the product line for future expansion.

Q8. How do I plan the layout of cubicles in my floor plan?

A: Start with a scaled floor plan and work from the outside walls inward. Place main aisles (primary circulation paths) first, then secondary aisles, then cube clusters. Cluster 4-6 cubicles around a primary aisle intersection. Account for fire exit clearance requirements. Keep tall panels away from window walls (they block natural light for other areas). Use your workstation size to calculate capacity: floor area minus aisles and perimeter spaces, divided by workstation footprint including aisle share. Most space planners can provide AutoCAD layout services.

Q9. What fabric options are available for panel upholstery?

A: Panel fabrics come in hundreds of colors and textures. Standard commercial fabrics are Type I or Type II (Type II is more durable, better for high-traffic). Most manufacturers offer fabric stocking programs where standard fabric colors ship quickly; custom fabrics may have longer lead times. Fabric selection affects the whole look of the space. Use neutrals (grays, warm whites, soft taupes) for the background panels and add accent colors in chairs or accessories. Avoid busy patterns or multiple strong colors — they create visual fatigue over time.

Q10. What's the typical lifespan of a commercial cubicle system?

A: A quality commercial cubicle system from a major manufacturer (Herman Miller, Haworth, Steelcase, HON, etc.) lasts 15-25 years with proper maintenance. The panels themselves are extremely durable; fabrics wear out and can be reupholstered at 8-12 year intervals. Work surfaces eventually show wear and can be replaced. The investment in a quality system pays off over the very long lifecycle. Buying a cheap import system to save upfront often costs more in 5-7 years when it needs replacing entirely.
