

How To Maximize Your Office Furniture Investment

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The following is a service publication of Haworth, Inc. It's intended to be a resource guide to help you quantify your next office furniture purchase.

This workbook provides insight into some of the elements that must be considered when purchasing office furniture. It outlines not only the decisions you'll need to make, but also the specific questions you'll want to ask prospective manufacturers and their dealers. The information is provided in an attempt to help you make the most informed decision possible. Toward that end, we think you'll find this publication to be a valuable resource.

Haworth, Inc.

BUYING OFFICE FURNITURE...

As you undoubtedly are aware, the options, styles and functions available in the world of office furniture are as diverse as the needs of the work-place itself. That's a good thing. It means that somewhere out there is a manufacturer with the products and services to match your company's specific needs. But admittedly, all these options can add to the complexity of the selection process.

So that's why we've developed this workbook--to help ensure that you maximize the value of your office furniture investment.

But what is "value?" It's a term that's often ambiguous because it tends to mean something different to everybody. It's best thought of as a comfort zone reached when you feel good about both the product's price tag and the benefits derived from ownership. But again, what benefits are most important? What should you look for in a manufacturer and its products? How can you quantify the decision making process?

On the subsequent pages, we'll provide you with a quantifiable method for selecting new office furniture. Feel free to tailor it to suit your needs. You'll find that it's a useful tool for getting your arms around your office furniture purchase.

USING THIS WORKBOOK...

In brief, when buying office furniture you want products that will last a long time, enhance the productivity of your employees, look good, be offered at a reasonable price, be serviceable and not become obsolete. So to ensure that you've got all these areas covered, this workbook is divided into three sections:

1. Selecting a Manufacturer--What factors to take into consideration when selecting an office furniture manufacturer.
2. Selecting Products--What factors to consider when reviewing comparable office furniture products.
3. Service Considerations--What services you should look for from the manufacturer and the local dealer to help maximize your office furniture purchase.

So let's take a look at each area separately and in detail. Once we've presented the rationale behind each consideration, you can turn to the "Score Sheet" on pages 14 and 15 and rate each area accordingly. But for right now, it's all about knowing the things to look for and asking the right questions.

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS...PURCHASE CRITERIA AND RATIONALE

I. Selecting a Manufacturer

Choosing a manufacturer is most likely the first decision you'll have to make related to your office furniture purchase. And it's a big one. According to industry statistics, there are over 200 office furniture manufacturers in the U. S. alone. But no two are alike, and there are probably only a handful that can provide all of the quality products and services demanded in today's marketplace. Here are the questions to ask when considering manufacturers.

A. Single-Source/Full-Line

Does the manufacturer offer a full and complete range of products and services? Chances are you're not going to need them all right away, but over time you may come closer than you think. You don't want to purchase a desk and then learn that you'll need to go somewhere else for the chairs and panel systems. Also, because the product lines of different manufacturers don't always mix, and because coordinating purchases between more than one vendor adds to the complexity of your purchase, look for a manufacturer that carries systems furniture, tables, desks, files and seating.

B. Ownership/Management

Look at the ownership and management structure of the manufacturer. Is the company publicly or privately held? If it's publicly held, what's the consensus of the financial community regarding the strength of the company's executive management team? If it's privately held, are the company's founders still involved in the business? Is the company's ownership truly concerned with manufacturing office furniture or does it simply view the company as a piece of a larger conglomerate puzzle?

C. Quality-Management System

Does the manufacturer have a total quality management and assurance system in place? Does it encompass everyone from its suppliers to its dealers and customers? Does the manufacturer seek feedback from its customers and have a mechanism for measuring the quality of each of its furniture projects? Is the company ISO-9001 certified? Does the company have a mission statement that embraces quality and the concept of total customer satisfaction?

D. On-Time Shipment Record

What's the manufacturer's record for on-time shipments? Does the company have a distribution network to ensure that you'll receive proper installation and service?

E. Experience

How much experience does the manufacturer have in the office furniture industry? Is office furniture its main focus? Is the company vertically integrated so that it's experienced in all aspects of the product cycle? How long has the manufacturer been in business? You want to be sure that the company will be around to serve your needs well into the future.

F. Size

How big is the manufacturer? If your company has more than one location, will the manufacturer be able to distribute to and service them all? Is the company able to handle your international needs if necessary? Is the company large enough to meet all of your furniture service and product needs yet small enough so you won't get lost in the shuffle?

G. Past/Future

Take a look at the manufacturer's past and ask about its plans for the future. Where were the company's sales 10 years ago versus today? How many product lines has it added over that same time period? Is the company growing, remaining stagnant or shrinking?

H. New Introductions and Innovations/Investment in R&D

Is the manufacturer a leader or a follower? Has it introduced any new and innovative products or features? Is it a pioneer in the industry or is it simply keeping pace? How much does it invest in research and development?

I. Financials/Stability

Take a look at the manufacturer's bottom line. Is the company in good financial condition? What are its sales? Is the company growing or shrinking from a financial standpoint? Compare the company's sales growth versus its competitors and the industry average. Is the company heavily leveraged? How is it funding its growth?

J. Environmental Consciousness

Does the manufacturer exhibit a high level of environmental consciousness? Does it have environmental policies and initiatives in place? Does it have environmentally sensitive manufacturing operations? What is the company doing to reduce packaging and waste materials, lower energy consumption, increase recycling, sustain hardwood forests and decrease harmful emissions?

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ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS...PURCHASE CRITERIA AND RATIONALE

II. Selecting a Product

The next decision you'll have to make concerns the product. Obviously, it has to be functional and pleasing to the eye; but once you decide on a product type, you'll literally have hundreds of color, fabric, wood and design combinations to choose from. The goal is to find the highest quality product for the money; and in this respect, no two products are alike. You'll find it helpful to ask the following questions when considering "comparable" office furniture products.

A. Complete Product Offering

Manufacturers typically carry several different lines or families of office furniture from which you'll choose the specific products that best suit your needs. Determining which line to consider then becomes the starting point. Does the line you're considering have the product variety and features you'll require? Will you have to go outside the product line for any additional pieces? Does the line offer an adequate degree of design flexibility? Does the manufacturer have complete and complementary lines so that it can meet all of your furniture needs?

B. Standard Features vs. Options

When considering a specific piece of furniture, make sure to determine which features are standard and which are options. Does the product you're considering have as standard the features you'll require, or will you end up paying extra for these options?

C. Design/Engineering/Durability

Is the product--and the manufacturer for that matter--known for its sound design and engineering content/capabilities? Has the product received any awards for outstanding design and/or engineering? Has the product been manufactured using ISO, ANSI, UL, CSA or BIFMA standards? How has the product been tested?

D. Price

What is the product's price relative to its quality and that of the manufacturer? Consider the product's true value by determining its "cost to own." In other words, ask what it will cost to own the product over the long haul. Is the product available at a variety of price levels? Is the product easy to use? How easily can the product be installed and/or reconfigured? How many replacement parts will you need to stock?

E. ADA/Ergonomics

Is the product ergonomically designed? Does it meet ANSI's ergonomic standards, such as ANSI-HSF 100? Does the product accommodate current ADA requirements and/or any related, pending legislation? Can it be modified to do so? Will it provide a long-term solution?

F. Obsolescence/Warranty

Does the product and/or manufacturer have a formal obsolescence policy? In other words, will you be able to get parts and service for the product well into the future? Also check the product's warranty. Is it a blanket warranty or are the product's different components covered for different periods of time?

G. Assembly/Installation Ease

Since time is money, how easily can the product be assembled and installed? If necessary, ask for an installation demonstration. Also determine if you'll be able to perform simple service functions yourself or if a dealer technician will be required for everything.

H. Fabric/Finish/Veneer Selection

Do you have a large variety of fabric and finish options to choose from? Will the fabric and color offerings endure or will they quickly become dated? How durable is the fabric or finish? Will the colors and fabrics match your organization's image and/or culture? Are the fabrics up to code? Do they meet CAL 116 + 117 specifications? Is CAL 133 available? Can you--the customer--supply your own fabric if necessary?

I. Accommodates Technology

How well does the product accommodate office technology? Can the lighting and power needs of individual work stations be easily met? Can the wire and cabling needs of computers, printers, fax machines and the like be easily routed and rerouted as necessary? Can circuits be isolated for computer use and protection purposes? Does the electrical system provide surge suppression and filtering options?

J. Custom Products

Can the product be customized to meet your specialized needs? For instance, can the product's dimensions be altered? Can you receive a special-shaped work surface if necessary? Can customized panel heights or fabrics be manufactured? In addition, can entirely new products be developed to meet a specialized need? And if a customized solution and/or new product development is possible, how fast can you get the product(s)?

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS...PURCHASE CRITERIA AND RATIONALE

III. Service Considerations

After examining each manufacturer and the individual products they offer, it's wise to consider the services available to you through the manufacturer and the local dealer. Office furniture is a major investment, and you'll want access to the services that will help you maximize your purchase. You may not need all the services provided, but you should at least ask questions about the following basics.

A. Dealer Network

Since most office furniture is distributed through independent dealers, analyze the strength of each manufacturer's dealer network? Compare and contrast them by size, number of locations and the proximity to your organization. Will the dealer be able to service you promptly? Will you be able to receive service at your satellite locations as well? Will you have international needs and can they be met? How strong or stable is the dealer that will be servicing you directly?

B. Installation, Reconfiguration and Maintenance

Does the manufacturer/dealer provide basic installation, reconfiguration and maintenance services? Are the technicians certified?

C. Design/Space Planning

Does the manufacturer/dealer have design and space-planning capabilities to help you configure your office space? Are computer-aided design (CAD) services available for quick, accurate layouts?

D. Employee Orientation

Will the manufacturer/dealer provide product-use demonstrations directly to your employees so they'll be aware of all the product's functions? Will they teach you how to perform simple maintenance operations? Are automated training tools, such as computer disks, available to help your employees learn about the product?

E. Trade-In Programs

Will the manufacturer/dealer help you get rid of your old office furniture? Will they help you create a written inventory of your old office furniture - no matter what brand it is - and then help you find a buyer?

F. Ordering System

How efficient is the dealer's/manufacturer's ordering system? How quickly can orders be placed and processed? Is there a lot of paperwork involved or is the process electronic?

G. Quick-Ship Programs

Does the manufacturer/dealer have a quick-ship program, or one that allows you to order and receive certain products in only a matter of days? If so, how quickly can you receive your order and how many different products are available through the program?

H. Service Parts

Does the manufacturer/dealer have a service to help you determine, order, install and maintain inventory of the basic parts most likely to require service sometime during the product's life? Will you have quick access to the parts necessary to perform routine service functions? Does the manufacturer/dealer have field technicians willing to train your internal facilities personnel on how to perform these functions?

I. Asset Management

Does the manufacturer/dealer provide asset management services? In other words, will they track and inventory all your furniture purchases from all your locations? For large organizations, this is critical. It allows you to know exactly what you own so that purchases are not duplicated, reconfiguration is made easier and your service parts inventory is not depleted. It also may prevent unnecessary purchases by allowing you to move under-utilized furniture from one location to another.

J. Financial Consultation

Does the manufacturer/dealer provide assistance in calculating cash flow, return on investment, financing options, depreciation, tax laws and cost/asset analysis? Do they provide tools that enable you to calculate the real costs of selecting furniture and defining facility space options?

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QUANTIFYING YOUR DECISIONS...

Once you've familiarized yourself with the considerations and criteria you'll need to apply to your office furniture purchase, it's time to attempt to quantify your decision. We've developed a "score sheet" to help you assign a numerical value to each of the items discussed in the "Asking the Right Questions" portion of this workbook.

We've provided examples of various ways to complete the score sheet. "The Primary Method of Scoring" is shown below. "Other Methods of Scoring" are shown on subsequent pages.

The Primary Method of Scoring

1. Determine up to four manufacturing candidates and write their names on the score sheet, giving each its own scoring column.
2. On a scale of one to five (1 = low, 3 = average, 5 = high), rate each manufacturer according to each facet of the purchase criteria. Reference pages 4 through 9 as necessary for a detailed explanation of the decision rationale.
3. Determine each manufacturer's subtotal for each of the three consideration areas.
4. Determine each manufacturer's grand total.

QUANTIFYING YOUR DECISIONS...

Other Methods of Scoring

Once you've completed the score sheet, you may wish to tailor it to suit your needs. Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Identifying the top performers.** Go back through the score sheet and circle all the fives. Determine which manufacturer has the most perfect scores.
2. **Focusing on key elements.** Go back through the purchase criteria and either highlight or circle the considerations you feel are the most important elements of your upcoming purchase. Tally the totals of the highlighted considerations for each manufacturer and compare the results.
3. **"Weighting" your totals.** Take your highlighted categories, assign a numerical value to each given its importance in your overall purchase decision and multiply this by the manufacturer's original 1-5 rating. For instance, if you have five highlighted categories, you could simply multiply your most important highlighted category by five, your second most important category by four, etc.
4. **Discovering who might best address your unique needs.** Rank the purchase criteria in order of importance according to your purchase needs. Determine which manufacturer(s) out perform(s) the others in your most important categories.

In conclusion, we hope you found this exercise helpful. At the very least, you now have an idea of all the things you'll need to consider as you look for office furniture. And no matter what size budget you have, you've now got the tools to maximize your office furniture investment.

SCORE SHEET

The Primary Method of Scoring

1. Determine up to four manufacturing candidates and write their names on the score sheet, giving each its own scoring column.
2. On a scale of one to five (1 = low, 3 = average, 5 = high), rate each manufacturer according to each facet of the purchase criteria. Reference pages 4 through 9 as necessary for a detailed explanation of the decision rationale.
3. Determine each manufacturer's subtotal for each of the three consideration areas.
4. Determine each manufacturer's grand total.

Other Methods of Scoring

Once you've completed the primary method of scoring, you may wish to tailor the results to suit your needs.

1. Go back through the score sheet and circle all the fives. Determine which manufacturer has the most perfect scores.
2. Go back through the purchase criteria and either highlight or circle the considerations you feel are the most important elements of your upcoming purchase. Tally the totals of the highlighted considerations for each manufacturer and compare the results.
3. Take your highlighted categories, assign a numerical value to each given its importance in your overall purchase decision and multiply this by the manufacturer's original 1-5 rating.
4. Rank the purchase criteria in order of importance according to your purchase needs. Determine which manufacturer(s) out perform(s) the others in your most important categories.

I. Selecting a Manufacturer

(*manufacturer name*)

- A. Single-Source/Full-Line
- B. Ownership/Management
- C. Quality-Management System
- D. On-Time Shipment Record
- E. Experience
- F. Size
- G. Past/Future
- H. New Introductions/Innovations
- I. Financials/Stability
- J. Environmental Consciousness

Subtotal

II. Selecting a Product

(*manufacturer name*)

- A. Complete Product Offering
- B. Standard Features vs. Options
- C. Design/Engineering/Durability
- D. Price
- E. ADA/Ergonomics
- F. Obsolescence/Warranty
- G. Assembly/Installation Ease
- H. Fabric/Finish/Veneer Selection
- I. Accommodates Technology
- J. Custom Products

Subtotal

III. Service Considerations

(*manufacturer name*)

- A. Dealer Network
- B. Installation/Reconfiguration
- C. Design/Space Planning
- D. Employee Orientation
- E. Trade-In Programs
- F. Ordering System
- G. Quick-Ship Programs
- H. Service Parts
- I. Asset Management
- J. Financial Consultation

Subtotal

TOTAL

ABOUT HAWORTH

Haworth is a leading manufacturer of quality office furniture. The company offers a complete line of furniture for office and institutional environments, including open-plan systems, seating, tables, desks and files.

Through its extensive dealer network, Haworth can also provide a wide range of services for the workplace, including space planning and design, asset management, product leasing, certified product installation and maintenance.

Haworth's manufacturing and distribution capabilities extend worldwide, and its products and services are recognized as meeting the highest international quality standards possible. The company's annual sales have consistently outpaced the industry's average growth rate, while innovative new product introductions continue to position Haworth as an industry leader.

For more information on Haworth, its products or services, please call 1-800-344-2600.

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