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The hybrid workplace playbook

We were not ready for the mass workplace disruption caused by COVID. Offices and buildings worldwide emptied almost overnight, and people had to quickly learn to manage working from home.

However, reckoning with how people build and inhabit space is not just a product of the pandemic. We've been misusing, miscalculating, and overdeveloping buildings for hundreds of years. This is an opportunity for us to do better.

While the tragedy of the pandemic cannot be misrepresented or overlooked, it's undeniable that COVID has acted as an agent of change for organizations all over the world. The financial, productive, and procedural impact the pandemic has had on companies everywhere has forced the realization that we can no longer continue to work within the flawed systems we always have.

One of the most foundational issues the pandemic has presented is centered around the function and utility of the office. We have now seen that employees can be productive from anywhere, and the role of the workplace needs to change to reflect that reality.

More than ever before, the office is no longer just a mandatory place for people to work independently. It has evolved into an essential space where community, creativity, and collaboration are built. For the global workforce, that means it's time to examine and restructure both where and how work gets done.

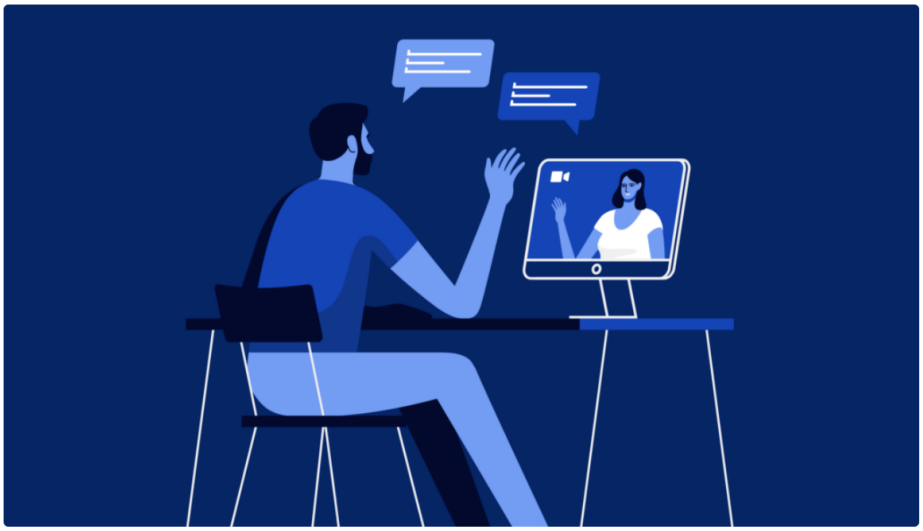
As a solution, companies are adopting hybrid work models where teams spend part of their time in the office and part of their time working remotely.

Hybrid work is the future. But in this contemporary landscape, we face a new challenge: How do we improve and adapt our spaces to operate successful hybrid models?

Companies are in need of more accurate data, employees need reassurance that they're safe in the office, and organizations need the flexibility to support their teams wherever they may be working.

We can build better spaces. Better spaces that are safe and efficient. Spaces that protect personal privacy and encourage our best work. Spaces that save millions of dollars while improving millions of lives. The future of space design demands better. Density can help.

Utilization



When office doors reopened, they led into workspaces with entirely new and complex variables to manage. Employees are now working in staggered shifts, occupying spaces with limited capacities, and are highly concerned about safety.

On top of that, asynchronous communication has become standard practice, and according to a study by PwC, 87% of employees are using their office specifically to collaborate in person, further complicating scheduling needs and social distancing concerns.

In short, people are using space in new ways, tasking workplace leaders to meet the demands of an office in flux. But, without a sufficient understanding of how employees interact in and with their workplace, redesigning for a hybrid-centered office is reduced to guesswork.

Creating well-balanced staggered schedules, planning COVID-safe floorplans, allocating team workspaces, and all other hybrid design tasks require an in-depth knowledge of how employees are using office space.

When you know where people spend their time, you can structure your space accordingly. You learn how to empower your employees to do their best work. You recognize and can address underutilized areas.

Getting insight into space usage is indispensable, especially when you consider that billions of dollars are spent annually on vacant space, or that workplace optimization directly influences employee retention.

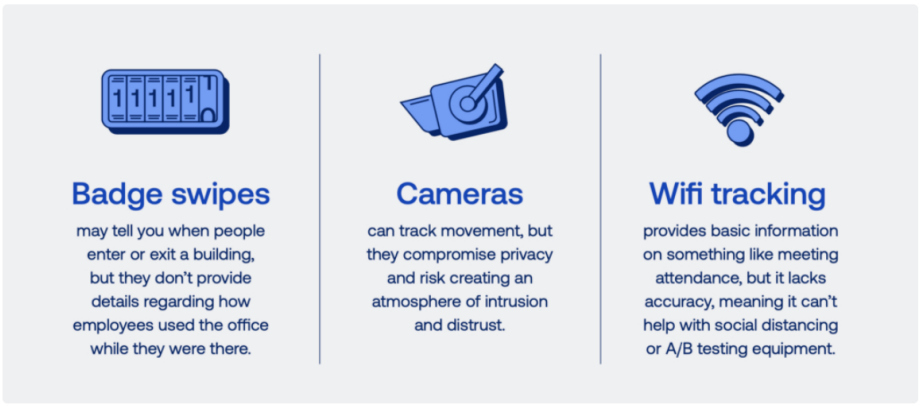
On an individual level, the shift to hybrid work requires that every office reconsider how design and usage have changed. The only way this works is by getting in-depth data.

For example, if you discover that one of your conference rooms is constantly at capacity, while an adjacent section of desks remains mostly empty, that data allows you to confidently make new design plans. By converting the unused neighborhood of desks into another space for collaboration, you are at once reducing the risk of reaching unsafe occupancy levels and eliminating dead office space.

Also, while some teams spend long hours at the office doing research, others may only need to stop by for meetings. Knowing the difference lets you create team neighborhoods that reflect actual usage. Or, maybe one of your teams is asking for a redesign that gives them more square footage in the office. When you have accurate data on how they are currently using their space, you will know if the reallocation request is justified.

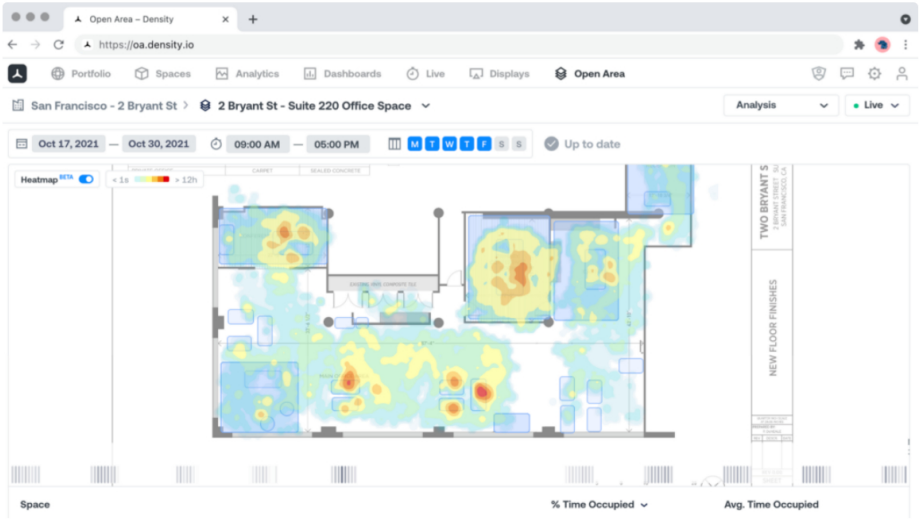
As you repurpose space and purchase new equipment to best facilitate hybrid employee needs, seeing how people interact with these changes tells you what is working and what isn't.

The current ways of monitoring and understanding employee space usage are limited and make it difficult for team leaders to make informed data-based decisions.



Using these inadequate metrics to attempt restructuring your office for a future of hybrid work results in the uncertainty of trial and error based planning. Like most things, to do a job well you need the right tools. For the job of designing better spaces, the right tool is data.

Heatmaps



Heatmaps (available with our Open Area sensor) provide the data you need to make educated choices in your office.

Using radar and heat mapping technology, heatmaps anonymously show you how your employees use the office. Based on your existing floorplans, heatmaps lets you monitor foot traffic, see how people in the office move between spaces, check what rooms, desks, or seating areas are frequently used, and discern the general workplace occupancy patterns.

This type of data helps you reduce costs for additional space by maximizing existing space to be as useful as possible for employees.

It can also improve your OPEX costs.

Consider spaces like cafeterias. Traditionally, facility managers will use peak-capacity metrics to make decisions about usage and needs. But these projections are often inaccurate, leading to overstaffing and food waste.

Using Density, you can look back at use history to get insight into traffic patterns, helping you make better and more accurate choices. In addition, Density uses predictive algorithms to show you what your cafeteria will look like next week, further refining your ability to make smart plans for the future.

This same process can be applied to A/B testing designs or equipment use. With the right data, you can see how office changes shift traffic patterns, room usage, and occupancy levels. If new changes increase where employees are spending their time, it validates the effectiveness of those changes and they can be strategically applied elsewhere.

By letting employees vote with their feet in this way, definitive data is created.

From there, making design plans becomes a matter of strategy, refining your space until it works as hard as your employees.

Social distancing





The airborne nature of COVID has forced us to completely reimagine how indoor spaces function. Being inside now means structuring and monitoring safe capacity limits and implementing stringent cleaning protocols. This can be particularly challenging for large offices that span numerous floors and house multiple teams all working on their own schedules.

Still, creating a safe space of any size requires a concerted and well-architected effort. Moreover, these practices need to be efficiently incorporated into the daily lives of employees. Not only do employees need tools that help them maintain social distance, but they also need overarching reassurance that their health and wellbeing are protected at work.

When someone doesn't feel safe in the office their enthusiasm and productivity will suffer, and they may in turn begin to resent their employer for not doing or caring more. Unfortunately, that means that even the most well-intentioned safety efforts, if unactionable and unnoticed by employees, could be both ineffective and create inner-office animosity.

It's not enough to set a capacity limit, provide hand sanitizer, and walk away. That is not a solution. The most critical safety measures are not procedural, but function at the day-to-day level.

For example, an employee may know that a room has a 25-person occupancy limit, but expecting them to do a headcount every time they want to enter is unreasonable, time-consuming, and prone to error. For the employee, this can be frustrating and distracting, and if they are high-risk or immunocompromised, potentially frightening and unmanageable.

When it comes time to clean, only knowing a capacity limit does not help mitigate risk. Imagine the difference in sanitation requirements (which directly translates
to employee safety) for a small conference room that has consistently high traffic and a large one that is infrequently used.

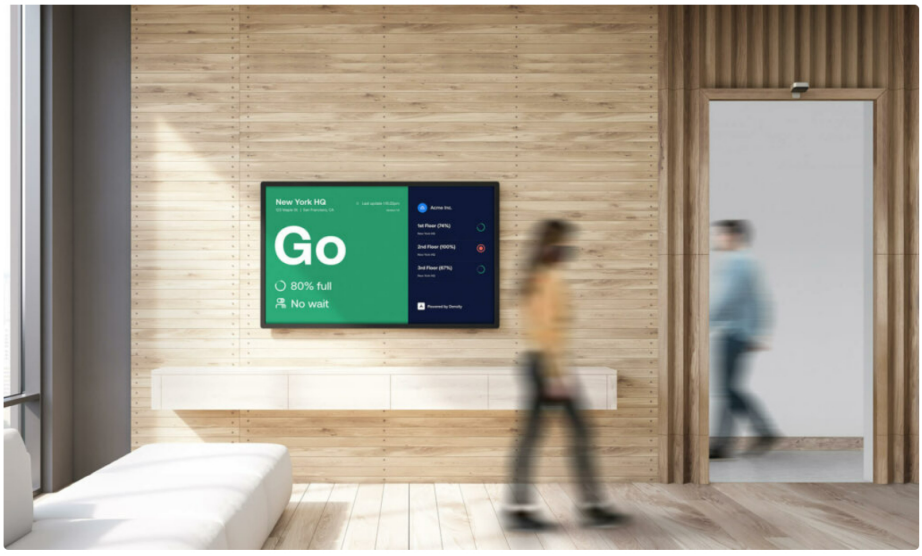
But with the right tools and procedures in place, you can create better spaces that are safe and easy to monitor, all with transparency that empowers employees with confidence—both in their ability to safely navigate the office and in trusting that their wellness is a priority.

And yet for most offices, safety is not an area of ownership and control, but one of concern and anxiety.

The reasons are rather straightforward: Pre-COVID offices were not equipped to address the concerns of a pandemic, and trying to contort old offices to meet new demands is a difficult feat. Floorplans were not designed to avoid chokepoints, rooms did not need minute-by-minute capacity updates, and sanitation teams focused on general cleaning rather than strict disinfecting.

Many spaces are simply not equipped to manage the novel needs we now face, and without adapting, they will remain unable to meet our most pressing safety demands.

Displays

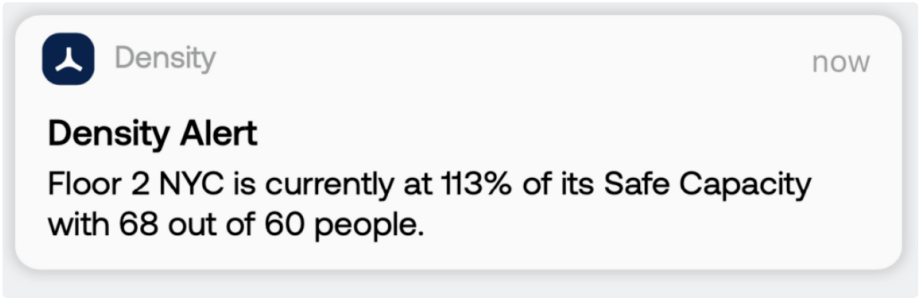


Density can provide your workplace with the tools it needs to overcome the obstacles of implementing and monitoring safety.

Our sensors anonymously track foot traffic and space usage to create real-time occupancy data. This information can then be displayed at the entryway of rooms to show employees when it's safe to enter.

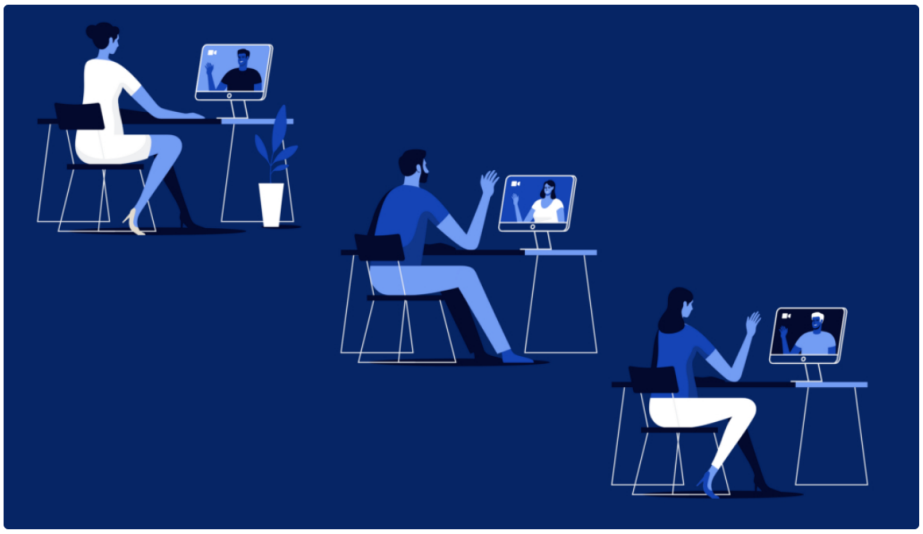
Alerts can notify workplace managers when unsafe limits are reached, allowing them to simultaneously monitor multiple spaces, and make

adjustments throughout the day to ensure everyone's safety.



Taking this kind of proactive and hands-on approach creates safer spaces that are easier to manage, while giving employees tools for frictionless social distancing, and showing them that they are being protected and cared for. Additionally, alerts can be set to notify space planners where the highest traffic areas are, so they can prioritize where cleaning crews focus their efforts — saving time and energy while making sure shared spaces get the attention they need to keep people safe.

Privacy



In times of crisis, when meticulous protocols need to be closely monitored, it's often difficult to balance scrutiny with privacy.

On the one hand, the ability to ascertain detailed data on where people are allows workplace leaders to imagine and redesign for better spaces, facilitating the needs of hybrid workers while promoting safety. But to do that, organizations will often resolve to using tech solutions that incidentally increase surveillance and impinge privacy.

This becomes problematic because the benefits of accruing data are offset by the detriment of employees who feel their privacy is being sacrificed. Without the ability to create space utilization data while protecting employee privacy, there will always be negative repercussions to any detailed office monitoring efforts.

Company culture is incredibly important and affects all aspects of a business, from the quality of work to employee investment and retention. This is predicated on an organization creating a mutually beneficial environment that is built on trust and respect.

While the intent of monitoring how employees occupy an office is usually based on improving space and ensuring safety, everyone values their privacy, and feeling like you are being watched is intrusive and stifling.

Being able to solve this seemingly paradoxical disparity is the only way to effectively track space utilization. When you can do that in a way that does not risk employee privacy, not only can you prevent any feelings of invasiveness that hurt company culture, but you can get the data you need while showing your teams that their safety is a priority.

In turn, this actually enhances the employee-employer relationship, instilling a sense of security and assurance in the office.

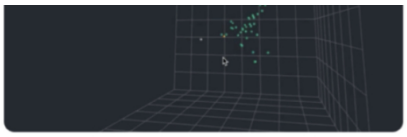
What makes this difficult is largely a lack of the proper technology. The tools that tend to get used are either not sophisticated and detailed enough to get proper data, or they are surveillance-style approaches that compromise privacy.

This places employers in a difficult position, and they are forced to choose between working with incomplete metrics to preserve privacy and placing intrusive equipment in their office that may get better data, but in doing so, make employees feel uncomfortable.

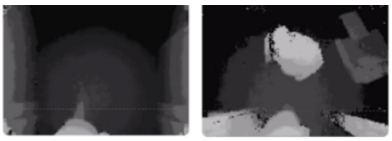
It doesn't have to be that way.

Sensors





Open Area



Entry

We recommend you always ask a vendor, “What do your sensors see?” We’re proud to show you what ours see (shown above).

Density sensors provide the most comprehensive space utilization data available and are anonymous by design.

Our custom radar system and depth-sensing monitors gather workplace information without capturing any personal information. That means they are effective, completely scalable, and never compromise employee privacy. The data collected is anonymous from end to end. It’s not hackable by outside parties because it is not “footage” that can reveal sensitive information, making it perfect for use in R&D departments, manufacturing lines, and other areas where proprietary information is crucial.