

B FREE LOUNGE FROM STEELCASE IS DESIGNED TO BRING NEW LIFE TO DEAD ZONES WITHIN OFFICES

# Waking the dead



**Y**ou don't need to be an avid reader of *Business Info* to know that the two forces shaping today's offices are mobility and collaboration – you just need to look at the ads of PC manufacturers and mobile phone companies.

Mobile communications, portable computers, wireless networks and IP telephony are having a profound effect on the design and nature of offices. The ability to work from client sites, hotels, cars and trains means that the corporate office is increasingly used not for routine work but for interaction with colleagues.

As the balance between personal and group space within offices shifts from a ratio of 70:30 in traditional offices to 30:70 in the modern workplace, the type of furniture specified by businesses is changing. In the future, businesses will specify fewer workstations and more soft furnishings for collaborative environments.

In response to this trend – and to allow it to quote for all elements of a fit-out – Steelcase has introduced B Free Lounge, a range of seating and tables for non-traditional office environments, including reception areas, cafés, team working areas and breakout zones.

Steelcase argues that B Free Lounge

also has much to offer conventional offices, in which as much as 30% of space is wasted. Typically, this includes reception areas, lobbies, corridors, hallways, stairwells, copying corners, printer stations and other 'in between' places where office workers cross paths with colleagues, hold ad hoc meetings or take calls on their mobile phones.

By installing furniture that allows employees to do these things in comfort, Steelcase argues that businesses can facilitate decision-making and the free flow of ideas and so increase productivity.

## BUILDING BLOCKS

B Free Lounge is not an especially striking range of furniture. Certain elements, such as the fabric-covered cubes, are almost nondescript and pieces that look fine in a light-drenched atrium or reception area could easily look dowdy when placed in a corridor next to a coffee machine.

More impressive is its flexibility. The ability to use a small number of core building blocks to create different settings to suit specific requirements, from relaxation to brainstorming, is what gives B Free Lounge its energy and its purpose.

The range is made up of cubes, beams,



tables, stools and a handful of accessories – backrests for the cubes and a wooden tray, the closest this range comes to a flourish. Later in the year, Steelcase is introducing screens that will enable users to achieve a better balance between public and private spaces.

Tables and beams are available in three heights: 430mm for informal settings; 720mm for normal work activities; and 1000mm for sit-stand working, the optimum level to get creative juices flowing.

The different pieces can be used on their own or combined in interesting ways to support a variety of activities. For

example, a beam that on its own acts as a bench can be used as a back/armrest or worksurface when placed beside or between cubes (see photo above).

Designed by Steelcase and design agency C10, B Free Lounge may not be the most exciting looking range, but it is undeniably flexible and may be just what designers and facilities managers need to bring dead zones within offices back to life.

[www.steelcase.com/uk](http://www.steelcase.com/uk)  
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