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**Office Furniture is Finally Changing. Here’s How.**

As it turns out, computers revolutionized everything but our office furniture.

It’s been three decades since the personal computer was introduced into most American workplaces, yet the average worker remains chained to a desk, tied down by three-prong power cords, phone cords, USB cables, and phone chargers.

That’s about to change. Some companies are exploring getting rid of landline phones. Some workers now exclusively use laptops and tablets that allow more mobility. And battery life is improving on many electronics.

Now, office furniture is finally catching up. One of the biggest trends in the industry right now is making everyday furniture more compatible with technology. That means building electrical panels in the armrests of sofas and lounge chairs and in the middle high-top cafeteria tables complete with USB ports and 110-volt outlets so that you can recharge your cell phone or plug in your computer while you sit.

This is the first step toward the true office of the future, a place where workers are unchained from their desks, free to work wherever it makes the most sense. The office of the future, as *The Atlantic* suggested in [“Thinking Outside the Cube”](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/thinking-outside-the-cube/399374/), will look less like the Jetsons and more like Harry Potter, where everyday office furniture like desks and chairs are almost magical: part furniture, part machine.

On deadline? Work from a designated quiet space free from distraction. Brainstorming? Collaborate with coworkers in a plug-and-play conference room. Doing something creative? Get your juices flowing on a comfy sofa with a view while you plug in your laptop and smartphone.

In our daily conversations, we use the office as a shorthand for our jobs: “How was the office today?” “I have to go to the office.” In a way, this is backwards.

The office, after all, is not the cause of our work, but a symptom of it. And our offices aren’t the deciding factor in how we work — they are designed to meet the demands of our jobs, within the limits of our technology.

As the CEO of a family-owned office furniture company now in its 20th year, I spend a lot of time thinking about how and why we use offices.

What is certain is we use offices because of the oldest—and still best—form of communication: face time.

Telephones, email, chat programs like Slack and Hipchat and videoconferencing programs like Skype and Google Hangout have their place, but nothing beats sitting across the table from another human being.

Working together in person helps strengthen and deepen our connections with the coworkers we work most closely with, and it encourages the kind of serendipitous encounters that help ideas spread across departments.

For that reason, I’m not too concerned that the office will go away. Until someone comes up with a new form of communication that is as effective as simply being in the same physical space together on a regular basis, there will be offices.

But how we work within the office is radically changing. That’s because the modern office was designed around some technological limitations that don’t really matter anymore.

First, almost every worker in an office needed a landline phone, since it was the primary way that they communicated with people inside and outside the company. Those had to be hardwired to a very specific location within the office.

Now, thanks to email and cell phones, we no longer really need to have a landline phone. (It’s probably more of an annoyance, since voicemails left on a landline phone aren’t as easy to check when you aren’t at your desk.)

Second, computers and other electronic equipment were oversized and needed dedicated power sources. That meant a bulky electrical strip underneath each desk for the computer monitor, CPU, printer, fax machine, and whatever else the office worker needed to get their work done.

Now, thanks to laptops, smartphones, and iPads, that’s not really true either.

The only reason that we continue to sit in the same spot every day at the office is to access an outlet and out of sheer habit.

With this new integrated technology into everyday office furniture there’s no reason that businesses couldn’t set up a bunch of plug-and-play workstations with built-in, electrical panels in the armrests, and let people sit and work wherever they want, whenever they want, without having to search for an outlet.

And that's just the beginning. The office of the future is coming, at long last.

Blake Zalcberg is chief executive officer for [*OFM*](http://www.ofminc.com), an office and school furniture manufacturer, distributor, and wholesaler headquartered in North Carolina with operations in Phoenix, Ariz. For twenty years, OFM has provided affordable, quality furniture through a dealer network to businesses, government, health care and educational facilities offering the latest concepts and designs in the furniture industry. Working with manufacturers in Mexico, Taiwan and China, OFM designs furniture to meet the highest industry standards which are sold through a variety of retailers, mail-order catalogs, and online dealers including Staples, Wayfair, Overstock, and National Business Furniture. To learn more about OFM, visit [*www.ofminc.com*](http://www.ofminc.com).