

Art Appreciation

James Stewart, of the Arts Council's Art & Business network, explains how investing in art makes sound business sense



Traditionally, office artwork, like office furniture, just needed to be suitable for the purpose, functional and not too expensive. As with furniture, the good stuff was saved for the boardroom. This is slowly changing as companies of all sizes begin to realise the importance of the workplace environment and the effect it can have on staff, clients and other visitors.

So what are the benefits of placing art in the workplace?

Decoration

Practically and simply, art decorates the workplace. This needn't only mean two-dimensional pieces – paintings, prints, photography – for the walls; ceramics, sculpture, glass and textiles are just a few of the other options. It's a relatively low cost yet highly effective way of creating visual interest and stimulation and providing that all-important feel-good factor.

Motivation

Contemporary art can promote debate and stimulate thought, improving communication

and teambuilding efforts within the office. Studies have shown that art in the workplace motivates staff, encourages interaction and boosts productivity. This in turn improves staff retention and saves you money.

Marketing

Your reception area is the first place your clients see. You could use it to showcase what you do or make, with photos of computers or widgets – but don't visitors already know about this? Better, surely, to show the company's vision and values. Create an impact with a few great pieces of art and you'll impress clients and have something to discuss over lunch. Art can create common ground for business relationships to build on: this in turn facilitates your sales efforts.

Investment

Many pieces seen in offices are worth less than half their cost as soon as they are hung. These may be pictures painted in high volumes by teams of "artists", or prints which are little more than framed posters. Choose your art carefully, though, and it becomes an investment in a tangible fixed asset which can hold or even increase in value. Amazingly, quality art needn't

be any more expensive. Why not look into buying a few well-chosen pieces and start your own corporate collection?

Giving

This may be an intangible benefit, but is no less powerful for that. Through purchasing art from a living artist, you can build up goodwill amongst employees, clients and the wider community. The choice of artist depends on your own taste and could be local, national or international. Whatever the choices, people will see that your company is one that "gives back".

James Stewart runs Art Means Business, a division of Arundel's Zimmer Stewart Gallery, which specialises in providing quality artworks to business clients. The works on this page are just a small sample of their portfolio.

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A recent survey supports the view that art in the workplace is good for business. The Business Committee for the Arts Inc. and the International Association for Professional Art Advisors surveyed more than 800 employees working for 32 US companies ranging from law firms to food distributors. The results reveal that art makes a tangible difference in how the vast majority of employees view their job, work environment and employer:

Of those surveyed, 94% said art enhances the work environment while 84% agreed it shows the company they work for is interested in improving quality of life. A majority of workers surveyed also agreed that art reduces stress, sparks creativity, enhances morale and broadens diversity.

Business First is a strong supporter of local art. If you know of an artist or gallery who you think should be featured on these pages, drop us a line on sussex@businessfirstmagazine.co.uk