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GETTING BACK TO BUSINESS:

HOW SOUND MASKING CREATES BETTER OFFICE ENVIRONMENTS

Executive Summary

As global workplace environments return to a state of relative normalcy, employers face important decisions regarding how best to accommodate workers' needs when they re-enter their "new normal" offices.

So, as workers continue transitioning back to their pre-pandemic, in-office and/or hybrid work schedules, employers should be focused on ensuring their staffs experience safe, healthy and comfortable workplace environments.

But it should be noted that well before the world knew about COVID-19, disruptive workplace acoustics caused significant productivity loss across all types of office environments. Noise distractions and a lack of speech privacy have been and will continue to be negative impacts on overall employee comfort and productivity.

So as you plan for the return of onsite staff, consider that maybe now's the time to address previously neglected workplace acoustical issues. Especially when it comes to echoing offices, which in most instances are open spaces with an abundance of surfaces that reflect, instead of absorb, disruptive sounds. Glass walls, open ceilings, uncovered concrete floors and plentiful windows combine to make many of today's office environments prone to negatively impactful acoustical challenges.

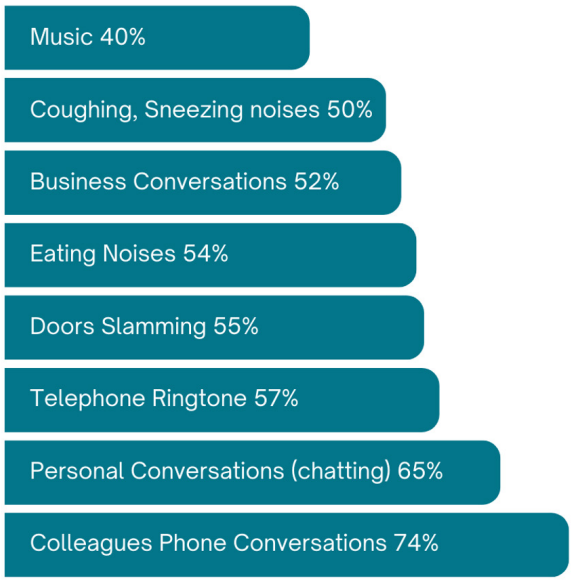
And the physical alterations that have been implemented to ensure a safe return to the workplace have done nothing but further degrade office environments' acoustics. We've already seen the widespread installation of hard, anti-viral surfaces as partitions between office staff. Such acoustically reflective additions do nothing to reduce disruptive noise.

EMPLOYERS NEED TO ADAPT TO A NEW, GLOBAL WORKPLACE REALITY

Open office architecture will remain. But the broad implementation of hybrid work schedules has resulted in reduced/ irregular office occupancy. This means noise distractions, speech privacy and employee comfort will likely become MORE problematic, not less.

More traditional offices with cubicle layouts are installing partitions between staff members, whether Plexiglas, modular wall system, or moveable screens. These options—which are solid surfaces to allow for easier disinfecting—are acoustically reflective and will dramatically alter an office environment's overall acoustics, making noise distractions, speech privacy and employee comfort even more prominent challenges.

WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST DISTRACTING IN THE WORKPLACE?



Source:
Remark Group. Noise and wellbeing survey. UK 2019

SOUND MASKING HELPS OVERCOME WORKPLACE ACOUSTICAL CHALLENGES, BUT WHAT IS IT?

Sound masking adds a professionally engineered, ambient sound to an environment (similar to water flowing or airflow) to obscure the other noises in the environment, making them less distracting. Sound masking doesn't eliminate all noises in an environment; it simply reduces the area where human speech is intelligible and distracting.

Adding sound to a space actually makes the space seem quieter. It seems counter-intuitive, but it's true. This is because the added sound reduces the intelligibility of speech. When what someone is saying isn't understood, their words are much less distracting.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO SOUND MASKING: DIRECT AND INDIRECT COVERAGE

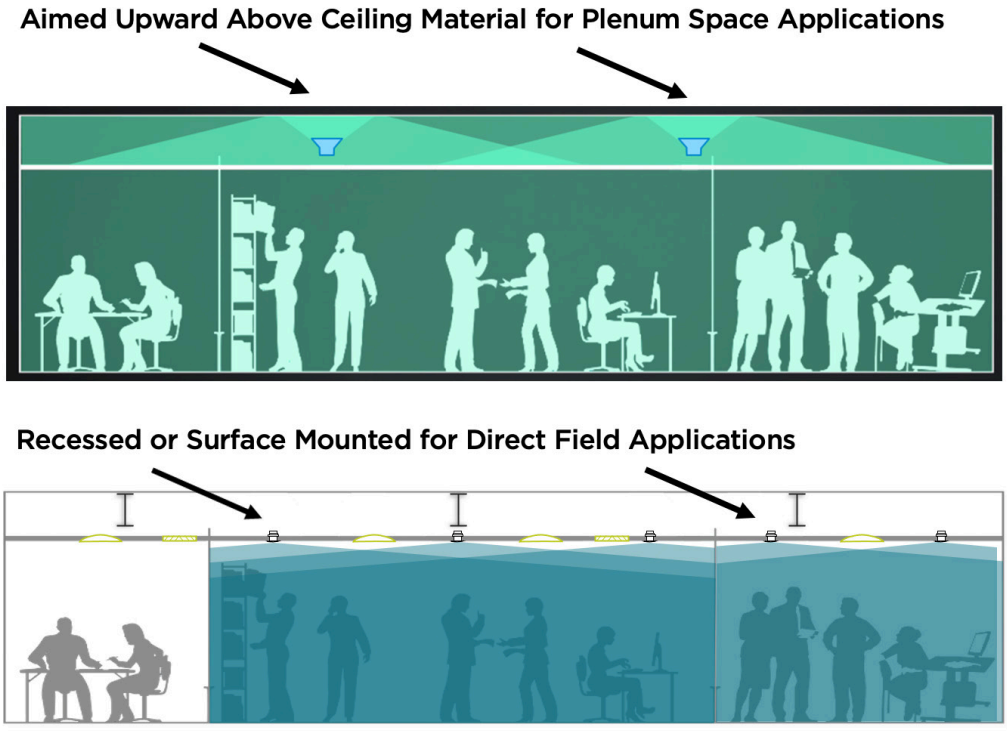
Direct (commonly called direct-field) sound masking uses small loudspeakers installed throughout the ceiling. The loudspeakers, which are also called emitters, broadcast the sound masking signal directly into the office environment.

The major advantage of direct-field sound masking is that it can be completely confined to the areas where it is required, and independent spaces, or zones, can more precisely receive the desired sound masking level.

Another method is through what's called indirect technology. With indirect sound masking, upward firing loudspeakers are placed below the ceiling deck in what's known as the plenum space.

The sound masking signal is broadcast against the ceiling deck and then reflects downward (often through ceiling tiles) and into the office environment.

The major advantage of indirect sound masking is the ability to individually tune the loudspeakers according to the plenum space's variables, like HVAC ductwork or extensive cabling infrastructure or other acoustic altering factors.



THE "NEW NORMAL" WORKPLACE – HOW CAN SOUND MASKING HELP?

With inconsistent—and more disruptive—office acoustics because of onsite employees with staggered schedules and the installation of more acoustically reflective surfaces, sound masking helps by introducing a consistent level of background sound to reduce noise distractions, increase speech privacy, increase employee comfort.

No matter the extent to which office architecture continues to evolve, the potential for noise distractions, lack of speech privacy, and insufficient employee comfort will remain. When employees endure more-frequent distractions, lack speech privacy, and feel less comfortable, overall business productivity suffers. The problems aren't going away, which is why sound masking remain an easily installed, cost-effective and necessary solution.

THE CAMBRIDGE QT X PLATFORM FROM BIAMP IS THE INDUSTRY'S MOST FLEXIBLE SOUND MASKING SOLUTION

Cambridge Qt X sound masking from Biamp accommodates both direct-field and indirect functionality on a single, secure network. And, to address the full spectrum of sound masking needs, Qt X controllers are available in 3-zone, 6-zone, and 8-zone models.

Designed to smoothly integrate with Biamp's existing audiovisual and voice communication solutions to better enable unified programming, deployment, and management applications, the Qt X series also offers seamless compatibility with convenience paging stations and background music sources.

BIAMP DELIVERS THE INDUSTRY'S BEST ADVANTAGES FOR SOUND MASKING END-USERS

Biamp partners with a vast network of industry leading solutions integrators who specialize in sound masking installation and deployment. And with initial design, engineering, manufacturing, testing, and post-installation support all managed within Biamp facilities, we provide unparalleled support, the most comprehensive training, and more responsive customer service—which combine to deliver superior experiences for our solutions' end-users.

SOUND MASKING HELPS ENSURE EMPLOYEES HAPPILY RETURN TO THE OFFICE

A commonly cited reason for dissatisfaction among employees asked to return to their pre-pandemic, in-office work schedules is a workplace environment that hinders their productivity. Which, according to findings by the Gensler Research Institute in their report, U.S. Workplace Survey 2022, interferes with employees' No. 1 motivator for being physically present in the office.

REASONS TO RETURN TO THE OFFICE

1.	Focus on my work	48%
2.	Access to technology	43%
3.	Scheduled, in-person meetings	42%
4.	Access spaces, materials, resources	39%
5.	Sitting with team	38%
6.	Professional dev/coaching	37%
7.	Scheduled, in-person meetings with clients	36%
8.	Socializing with colleagues	36%
9.	Access to senior leaders	35%
10.	Visible for opportunities	34%
11.	Impromptu, face-to-face time	32%
12.	Community building	30%
13.	Access to ergonomic work setting	25%
14.	Access to ameneties	24%

Because of the various acoustical issues associated with the "new normal" office landscape (as described previously), workplaces with inconsistently noisy environments will deter staff from returning to the office. Employees need their employers to ensure that time spent in the office will be as productive as possible, which means mitigating noise distractions—and there's no better way to do so than with Cambridge Qt X sound masking from Biamp.

"The most important reason to come into the office is 'to focus on my work,' according to our panel-based survey of 2,000 U.S. employees this year."

- GENSLER U.S. WORKPLACE SURVEY 2022

SOURCES:

2022-2023 CBRE Global Workplace & Occupancy Insights report

Gensler Research U.S. Workplace Survey 2022

For more information or to schedule a sound masking demo, visit biamp.com/qtx

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