

INSIDER'S GUIDE

The 10 Biggest Mistakes to Avoid When Buying Healthcare Furniture



INSIGHTS FOR A BETTER BUYING EXPERIENCE

Insider's Guide to Buying Healthcare Furniture: The 10 Biggest Mistakes to Avoid

Buying furniture for a healthcare facility requires practical considerations that go far beyond aesthetics. The comfort and safety of your patients and employees must be factored into every decision. By avoiding a few commonly made buying mistakes, you can help ensure that the furniture you select will serve the needs of your medical facility for many years to come.



HEALTHCARE FURNITURE BUYING MISTAKE # 1

Selecting The Wrong Fabrics

Just because a fabric is attractive and appears durable doesn't guarantee that it will meet your needs. Vinyl chair covering is a good example. When purchasing chairs for your healthcare practice, it isn't enough to simply ask for vinyl upholstery. You need to specify a healthcare-grade vinyl that can easily withstand cleaning with a bleach solution to eliminate bacteria and other pathogens. Vinyl can also be specially treated with a protective antimicrobial coating to inhibit the growth of harmful bacteria and help the fabric withstand heavy use.

Engineered fabrics such as Crypton® offer excellent durability for healthcare applications. Each fiber is individually treated to resist stains, moisture and bacteria. The fibers are then tightly woven, providing a strong fabric barrier that prevents any substances from getting through to the cushion.

HEALTHCARE FURNITURE BUYING MISTAKE #2

Not Analyzing What's Good And Bad About The Products You Already Have

When you're replacing existing furniture, take the time to evaluate what worked and what didn't work with each piece you're replacing. This process will help you refine your specifications for your new purchases. It can also be helpful to solicit input from any staff members who use the furniture on a daily basis. If you don't, you may never know, for example, that the stools in your examining rooms are difficult to adjust or that your receptionist really needs a desk with a keyboard tray. By taking the time to make an accurate assessment of the furniture you have now, you can avoid repeating earlier buying mistakes.

HEALTHCARE FURNITURE BUYING MISTAKE #3

Failing To Accurately Assess Needs

Before beginning the furniture selection process, it's important to put together a list of specifications for each item in terms of design, comfort, function, durability, maintenance, and other key criteria. This process will help you narrow down your choices to items that fit your needs. If it's a chair, for example, will it be used occasionally (as in a guest chair) or all day (such as a staff desk chair)? Does it need to be height-adjustable or fixed? Does the furniture need to be light enough to be moved easily or will it be stationary? If possible, invite input from employees who will use or maintain the item. They can often offer important insights that can help you make the right choice. All too often, furniture buyers rush through the decision because they have more important tasks to take care of, but the small amount of time they save can result in a purchasing decision that is regretted for many years to come. If you've ever had to put up with an uncomfortable desk chair or a filing cabinet too small to meet your needs, you know how frustrating that can be.

HEALTHCARE FURNITURE BUYING MISTAKE #4

Selecting A Product That's Not Rated For The Task

If all patients and staff members had the same build or body type, buying desk chairs and waiting room furniture would be a whole lot easier. But that's not the real world. Instead, you need to be able to comfortably accommodate individuals of all shapes and sizes, from pediatrics to bariatrics. A desk chair that's only rated for use by individuals weighing up to 250 pounds, for example, can only lead to problems if you have staff members or patients who weigh more than that. Choosing an incorrectly rated item can result in costly damage to the chair, and, more importantly, injury to the person sitting in it. In that case, any savings you realized by purchasing a lower-rated chair would be far exceeded by the cost of your liability to the person who was injured.

HEALTHCARE FURNITURE BUYING MISTAKE #5

Not Paying Enough Attention To Function While Evaluating Appearance

There's no doubt that the professional image you project builds confidence in the patients you serve. That's why it's important for you to have a wide range of furniture options available to you so you can select the exact items, finishes and fabrics that project your medical facility's image. While evaluating each item's appearance, be sure you carefully consider its function, as well. Ergonomic design is critical to the comfort and productivity of your staff. Features such as contoured seats, lumbar backrest supports, footrings and adjustable seats and armrests can help minimize work-related injuries and lost workdays. In turn, those factors can help reduce your costs for worker's compensation and medical insurance.

HEALTHCARE FURNITURE BUYING MISTAKE #6

Choosing Price Over Value

Everyone loves a bargain, but when you're evaluating price, make sure you give equal weight to value. To make the smartest buying decision possible, consider the cost of ownership over the expected life of the furniture. Here's an example. A chair that's designed for occasional use will generally cost less than one that's designed to withstand heavy wear and tear. While it may be tempting to purchase the lower-priced chair, that would be a mistake if the chair will receive heavy use. In that case, repairs and replacements could easily cancel out any initial savings and could even make the product more costly over time. There are occasions, of course, when you must purchase an inexpensive item to "make do" in an emergency. In that case, consider the item disposable and factor in a more suitable replacement in your budget planning as soon as it is economically feasible.

HEALTHCARE FURNITURE BUYING MISTAKE #7

Not Coordinating The Product's Life Expectancy With Your Accounting Department's Depreciation Schedule

If your accounting department depreciates major furniture purchases over a ten-year period, yet you purchase items with a five-year warranty, you may be forced to replace them sooner than your budget will allow. As a result, your purchasing needs will quickly grow out of sync with your company's accounting practices.

HEALTHCARE FURNITURE BUYING MISTAKE #8

Not Evaluating The True Cost Of Ownership

The base price of the furniture is just the starting point. In order to fully evaluate its true cost of ownership you must add in items such as freight charges, taxes, any packaging or special handling required and services such as assembly and installation. Even the term "Delivered Price" can mean many things. Will the shipment only be delivered to your dock? Will you require inside delivery? It's important to factor all of these items into the item's total cost while making a purchasing decision. Be sure to review and compare warranties, as well. Hopefully, you'll never need them. But if you do, it's good to know upfront exactly what is covered, and for how long.

HEALTHCARE FURNITURE BUYING MISTAKE #9

Not Asking Your Dealer To Keep Your Standards On File

Once you've established specs for your staff task chairs, for example, you can simply specify "staff task chair" the next time you order. It's a lot easier than digging back through your files for the correct fabric description, item number, chair rating, etc. By keeping standards on file, your vendor will automatically know, for example, that "staff task chair" really means an "Executive synchro-tilt task chair in fabric #37 Navy with 12-position height adjustable back, pneumatic seat adjustment and rated for 350 pounds." Not only will this help ensure that the new item matches your current furniture, but it will save you valuable time, as well.

HEALTHCARE FURNITURE BUYING MISTAKE #10

Doing Business With A Vendor That Offers Little Or No Support After The Sale

Of course, most vendors will be attentive to your needs while they're in the process of making the sale, but what happens afterwards? Neglecting to properly assess how the vendor will handle warranty service and other satisfaction-related issues can lead to headaches down the line. It's a good idea to ask your vendor questions such as "How will you handle warranty repairs?" or "What if the desk becomes scratched in shipping?" Ask your vendor for references so you can find out how they handled any problems that arose during the delivery and/or installation process in the past. The last thing you want is a vendor that ships the order to you and then forgets about it. Even something as simple as returning a small side table with a broken leg can become costly and time-consuming if you don't have a local representative who can step in and offer the service and support you need.

THE SMART BUYERS CHECKLIST

12 Key Questions To Ask Your Furniture Dealer

Do you offer a wide selection of healthcare grade fabrics in colors and styles that will compliment my facility's image and decor?

What can you tell me about the different types of healthcare grade fabrics? (i.e. How are they treated, what are their performance ratings, how do I clean the fabric, and why should I choose one fabric over another?)

Do you offer the breadth and depth of furniture choices I need to meet the unique needs of my staff members and patients? (i.e. In terms of design, comfort, function, durability, maintenance, and other key criteria my team and I have deemed important.)

What is the life expectancy and performance rating of the furniture that I am buying?

What is your "Delivered Price"? Does the price include freight charges, taxes, any packaging or special handling required and services such as assembly and installation?

How long will it take to deliver and install my furniture? What steps do you take to ensure that my furniture will be delivered on-time and on-budget?

What is your returns policy? What would I need to do to initiate the process? Are there any restocking fees or other costs involved?

What is your repair policy? Are replacement parts easy to obtain? What would I need to do to initiate the process?

What is the warranty period and what exactly does it cover?

Do you offer loaner furniture in the event we need to return an item for replacement or warranty repair?

What kind of service and support do you offer after the sale?

Can you provide me with any local references?

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419 East Gano Ave
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Phone: (314) 241-8787
Fax: (314) 241-8788
Email: info@mystloffice.com
www.mystloffice.com