

THE **TREND** REPORT

WORKING FROM WORK: **OFFICE FIT-OUT TRENDS**



From the early years of the 18th century through the early years of the 21st century, the concept of the office building didn't change much.

Buildings grew taller, layouts became more or less open, and technology evolved to help employees complete their tasks, but the idea of a communal building where employees came in, worked and left at the end of the day had been solidified during the heyday of the British Empire.

Then came the internet, which allowed people to telecommute from anywhere at any time; the maturation of Millennials and Gen Z, who expect a greater work/life balance than previous generations; and the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw global shutdowns of central business districts with mandates that employees remain at home. There, they developed new routines, learned new ways to be productive, and discovered that life and business can exist outside the office.

The result shattered the traditional 9 to 5 corporate existence that had enabled the growth and dictated the norms of the office sector, a \$381.5 billion market in the U.S. alone.¹ Six years after the shutdown, office occupancy in the U.S. still has not achieved pre-pandemic levels in some markets.

Today, employees must be enticed to return, and office owners and managers are learning that one key is to provide home- and hospitality-style amenities that make their lives healthier, more convenient, more productive, and more sociable to justify that commute.

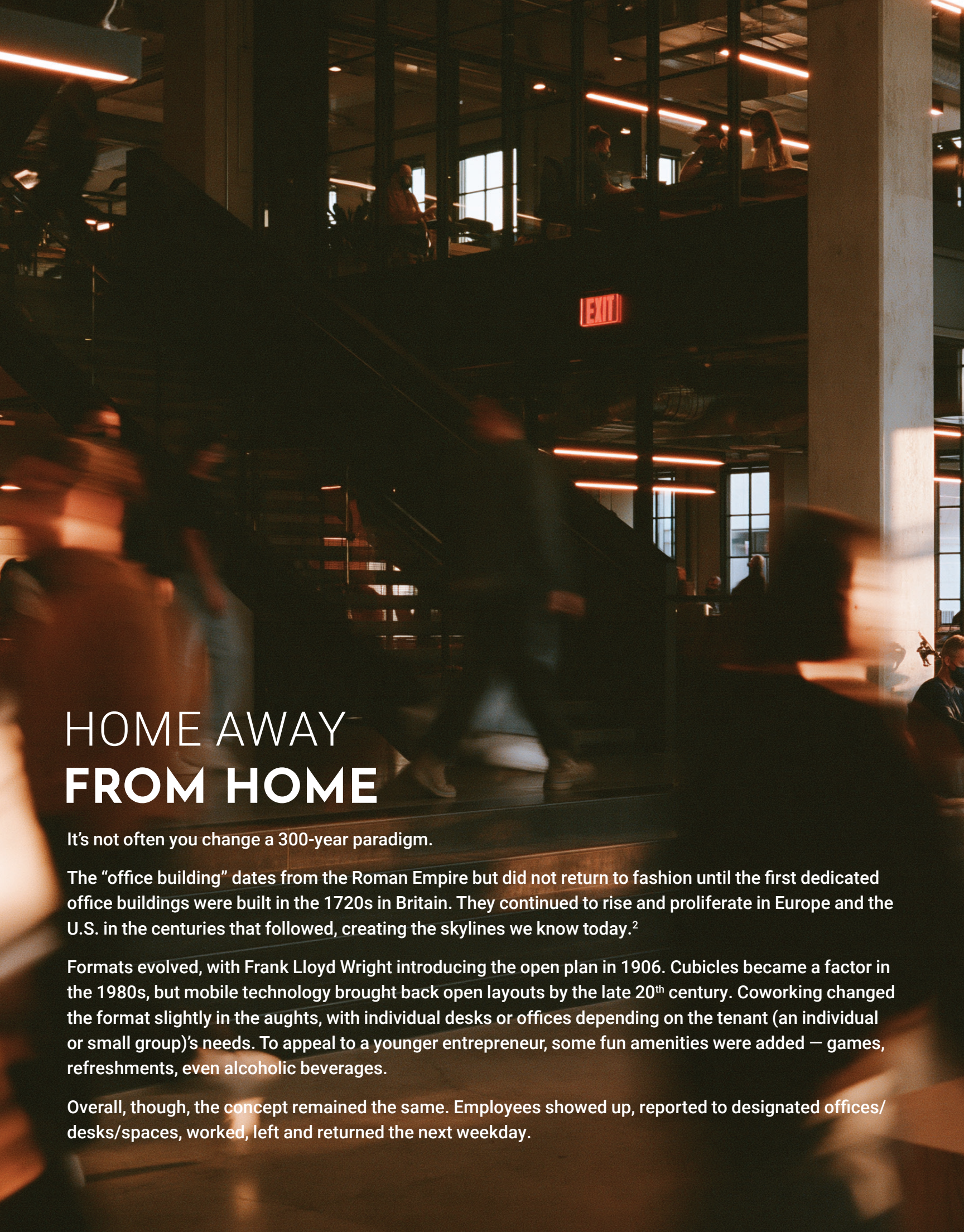
The following pages describe what amenities are being added to today's offices, how they benefit employees and managers, and how they can contribute to NOI.

Let's get to work.



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HOME AWAY FROM HOME

It's not often you change a 300-year paradigm.

The “office building” dates from the Roman Empire but did not return to fashion until the first dedicated office buildings were built in the 1720s in Britain. They continued to rise and proliferate in Europe and the U.S. in the centuries that followed, creating the skylines we know today.²

Formats evolved, with Frank Lloyd Wright introducing the open plan in 1906. Cubicles became a factor in the 1980s, but mobile technology brought back open layouts by the late 20th century. Coworking changed the format slightly in the aughts, with individual desks or offices depending on the tenant (an individual or small group)'s needs. To appeal to a younger entrepreneur, some fun amenities were added — games, refreshments, even alcoholic beverages.

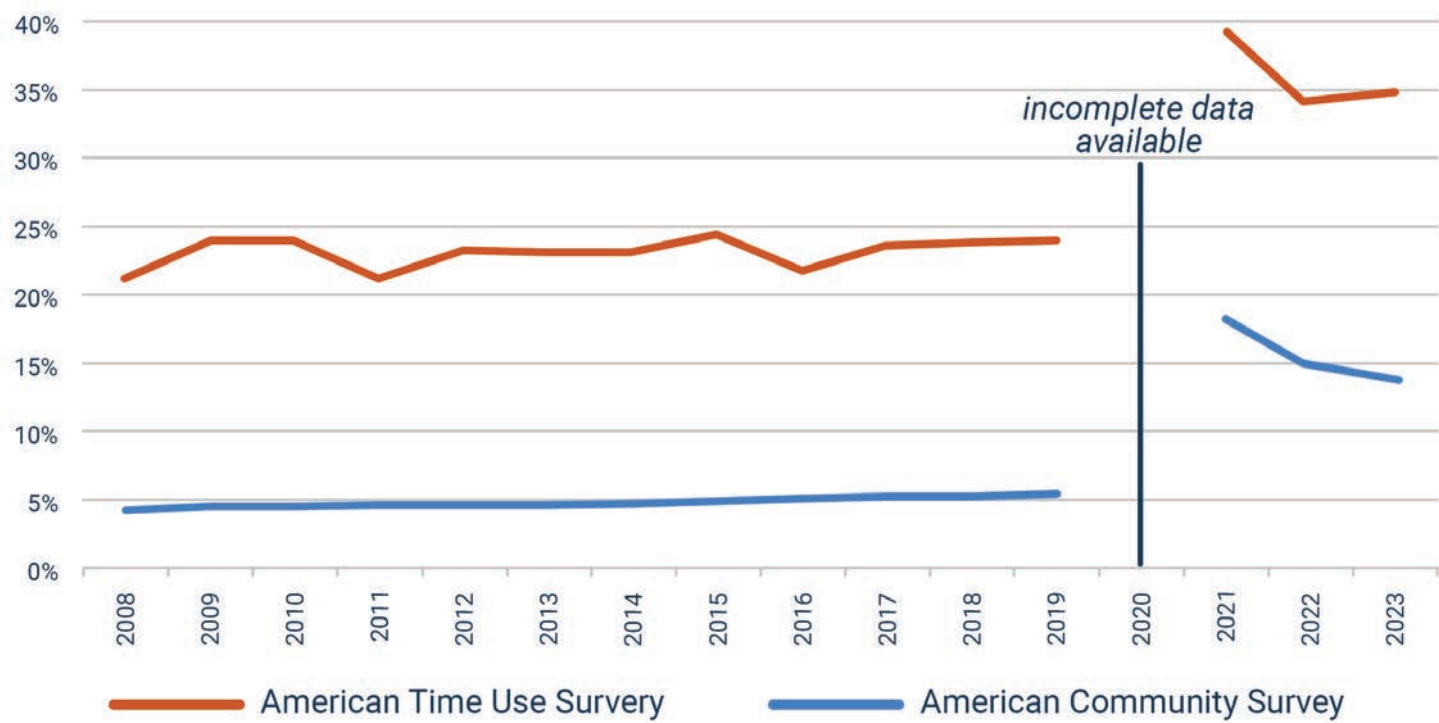
Overall, though, the concept remained the same. Employees showed up, reported to designated offices/desks/spaces, worked, left and returned the next weekday.



THE COVID REVOLUTION

COVID-19 upended that, with global mandates for all to remain at home for extended periods.

Figure 1. Percentage of Respondents Working Remotely, 2008-2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (Census), American Community Survey 1-year estimates, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs> and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), American Time Use Survey, Table 6. Employed persons working at home, workplace, and time spent working at each location by full and part-time status and sex, job holding status, and educational attainment, 2023 annual averages, <https://www.bls.gov/tus/>.

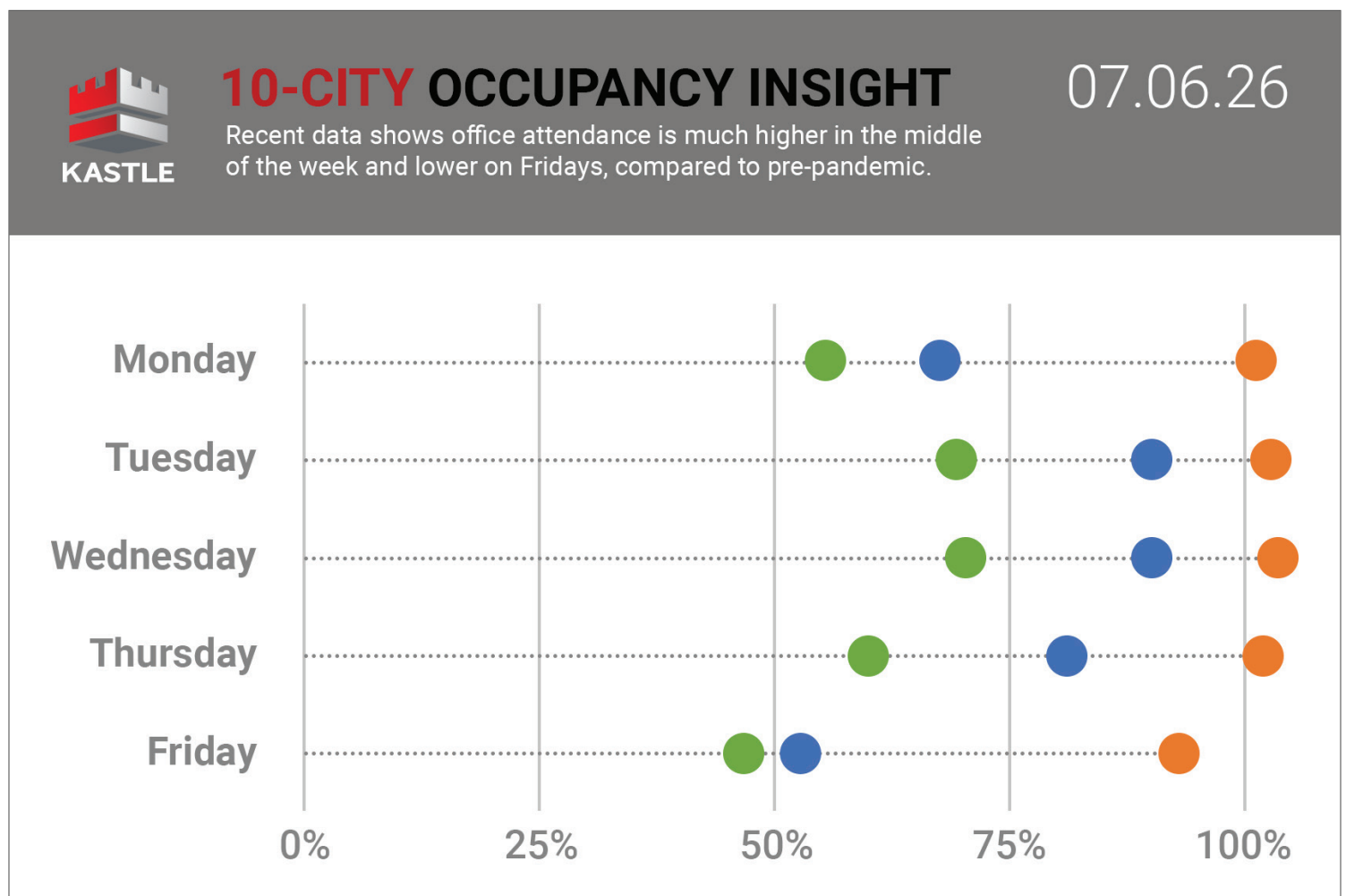
Notes: Both ATUS and ACS collected incomplete data for 2020, which are not included in the graphic.

Enabled by high-speed internet, sophisticated servers, and more, employees could connect virtually and complete their work on their own schedules without leaving home. People developed new routines, regained hours (and monies) lost to commuting, and even relocated to more affordable areas while keeping big-city jobs. This particularly appealed to Millennials and Gen Z, who historically have sought a greater work/life balance.

The professional losses were real, as well — less socialization, more difficult collaboration, and fewer mentorship opportunities. But many thought the tradeoff was worthwhile.

As the pandemic eased, companies expected their staff to return to a full, five-day-a-week schedule. But many employees pushed back, willing to return only for parts of the workweek. In 2025, the Pew Research Center reported that 75% of employed adults who can work remotely do so at least part-time. Nearly half of those (46%) said they would be unlikely to stay in their current job if they were no longer allowed to work from home.³

With stay-at-home mandates long ended, and return to office mandates instituted, office occupancy is still not at pre-2020 levels, largely concentrated during midweek.

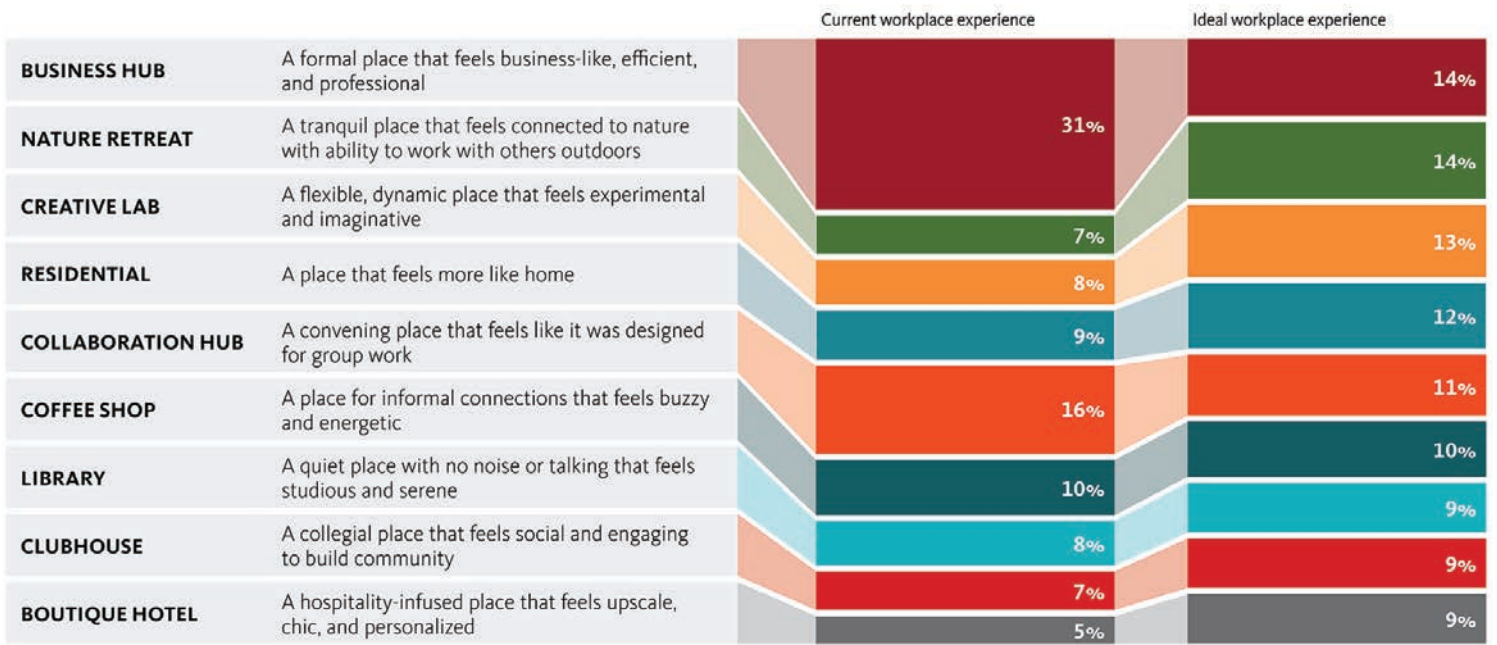


Source: Kastle

As office needs shrink as a result and leases expire, office users are relocating to larger, newer buildings in a flight to quality. In the first half of 2025, reported CREXi, more than 80% of large (20,000 square feet or more) leasing transactions consisted of companies relocating to higher-quality spaces.⁴

Workers have become used to many of the comforts and conveniences of home being readily available to them during the workday. The days of foosball tables and free beer are done; today, amenities must focus on making the lives of daytime office workers easier, healthier and happier. In order to justify the commute, office building owners and managers must offer some of those comforts and conveniences as cost effectively as possible so that workers will want to come to the office.

“CRE leaders need to think about space as a service, and experience as the product,” Kyle Haakenson, Founding Partner, Porter and Michael Webb, Partner, Real Estate Group, Farrell Fritz, P.C. in New York told BOMA. “That requires investing in physical design, operations, curation, and community-building. Gen Z is selective and budget-conscious, but they’ll spend on what they feel connected to, so authenticity, storytelling, and experiential quality matter more than flash.”⁵



This chart compares global workers’ current workplace experiences vs. their ideal experience.

Source: Gensler Workplace Survey 2025

THE 3 Cs: **GIVE 'EM WHAT THEY WANT**

To bring back the Millennials and Gen Z, who now constitute the majority of office employees, it's imperative for office designers to create environments that offer what they want: community, comfort, and convenience.

And increasingly, said design firm Gensler, workplaces must think outside the box.

"Forget the buzzwords and beige predictions — this is the year of bold moves, human-first thinking, and AI that doesn't just answer questions but joins the team."⁶







COMMUNITY

Post-pandemic, workers crave personal connection, and workplaces are evolving to offer a variety of internal spaces that can create interactivity.

The buildings themselves also must feel more home-like and welcoming.

- Attractive lobbies, perhaps featuring coffee stations with baristas.
- Coworking spaces both inside and outside the building.
- A program of regular tenant gatherings such as classes and events, from movie evenings to mocktail parties.
- Programs that reach out to the community, such as beekeeping, practiced by companies including KBS, Goldman Sachs Asset Management and more.⁷
- Tenant-only rooms that can be reserved or rented for events/large meetings, etc.

Both in terms of office design and amenities, flexibility and collaboration are paramount. Companies can provide:

- Hotel-like reception areas that feel welcoming and luxurious and encourage interaction.
- Designs that include smaller spaces that allow informal gatherings, not just huge conference rooms.
- In-office kitchens that can allow casual interactions, as well as free coffee, refreshments, lunch, and perhaps even a corporate barista.

A photograph of a rooftop terrace at sunset. In the foreground, a person is sitting at a desk, working on a laptop. In the background, two other people are also working on laptops at desks. The terrace is surrounded by a glass railing. The city skyline is visible in the distance, with the sun setting behind the buildings, creating a warm, golden glow. The overall atmosphere is calm and productive.

COMFORT

Today's workers prioritize work/life balance and wellness, and the landlords and office tenants that are drawing employees back are offering some of the comforts of home.

In terms of construction, outdoor spaces have become critical, be they private terraces or shared outdoor spaces.



“Without a doubt, our emphasis on a building design that prioritized the availability of private terrace space helped us achieve the rent and demand that we did,” Ted Koltis, Executive Vice President of Columbia Property Trust, told Perkins+Will of 799 Broadway. The building offers private terraces for nearly every tenant and was 85% leased before construction was completed.⁸

Existing buildings can be retrofitted or redesigned to include some or all of the following:

- Sophisticated HVAC systems/lighting controls for comfort.
- Natural light where possible.
- Plants proven to improve air/wellness/productivity.
- Cafes.
- Gyms.
- Fitness classes.
- Doctors on call, urgent care facilities, or members-only medical services.

TOP DESIRED AMENITIES



- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. Café, Market/
Food Hall | 10. Fitness Area/
Well-Being
Center |
| 2. Work Café/
Coworking Area | 11. Project/
Dedicated Team
Room |
| 3. Lounge/Hub | 12. Innovation Hub |
| 4. Rest/Nap Space | 13. Immersive
Technology
Space |
| 5. Quiet/Deep
Focus Area | 14. Reflection/
Meditation Space |
| 6. Focus Room | 15. Tech-free area |
| 7. Outdoor
Workspace | 16. Touchdown/
Alternative
Individual
Workspace |
| 8. Phone/Video
Room | |
| 9. Library | |

Source: Gensler Workplace Survey 2025





Within individual offices, companies can consider providing:

- Higher-end finishes and furnishings reminiscent of hotels in reception areas, restrooms and more.
- Quiet zones for prayer, meditation or to support neurodiversity.
- Mother's rooms to permit nursing.
- Colorful artwork to boost productivity.
- Fitness classes in-office.
- Standing desks.
- Free healthy snacks.
- Personal services such as manicures.

CONVENIENCE

The commute is part of the workday and making its beginning and end as easy as possible can be a huge benefit. Buildings can offer:

- Sophisticated parking technology to help locate spaces, speed payment, and more.
- EV charging stations.
- Bike storage.
- Showers and lockers so bikers and others can clean up before getting to their workspaces.

The next question becomes: Where can these physical amenities be situated?

One answer is space that has been difficult to lease to a paying tenant. The result can improve wellness and sustainability scores, improving appeal, as well as NOI.

“If done correctly, the void costs for difficult-to-let spaces can be removed from the asset’s cash flow and often be recovered through service charges,” according to the RICS Property Journal. “In turn, this can support marketing efforts, secure new lettings and renewals and increase rents across the building.”⁹

Other possible conveniences focus on everyday errands:

- An in-building or digital concierge to assist with tickets, dinner reservations and more.
- Centralized source for booking meeting rooms, etc.
- Dry cleaning collection and pickup.
- Personal storage.

THE 4TH C: COST

While global giants such as Google and Meta have provided all or many of the above in multibillion-dollar, brand-new headquarters spaces, even older buildings can add many of them. The question is how much to invest and where for the best return on investment, be that higher rents or tenant retention.

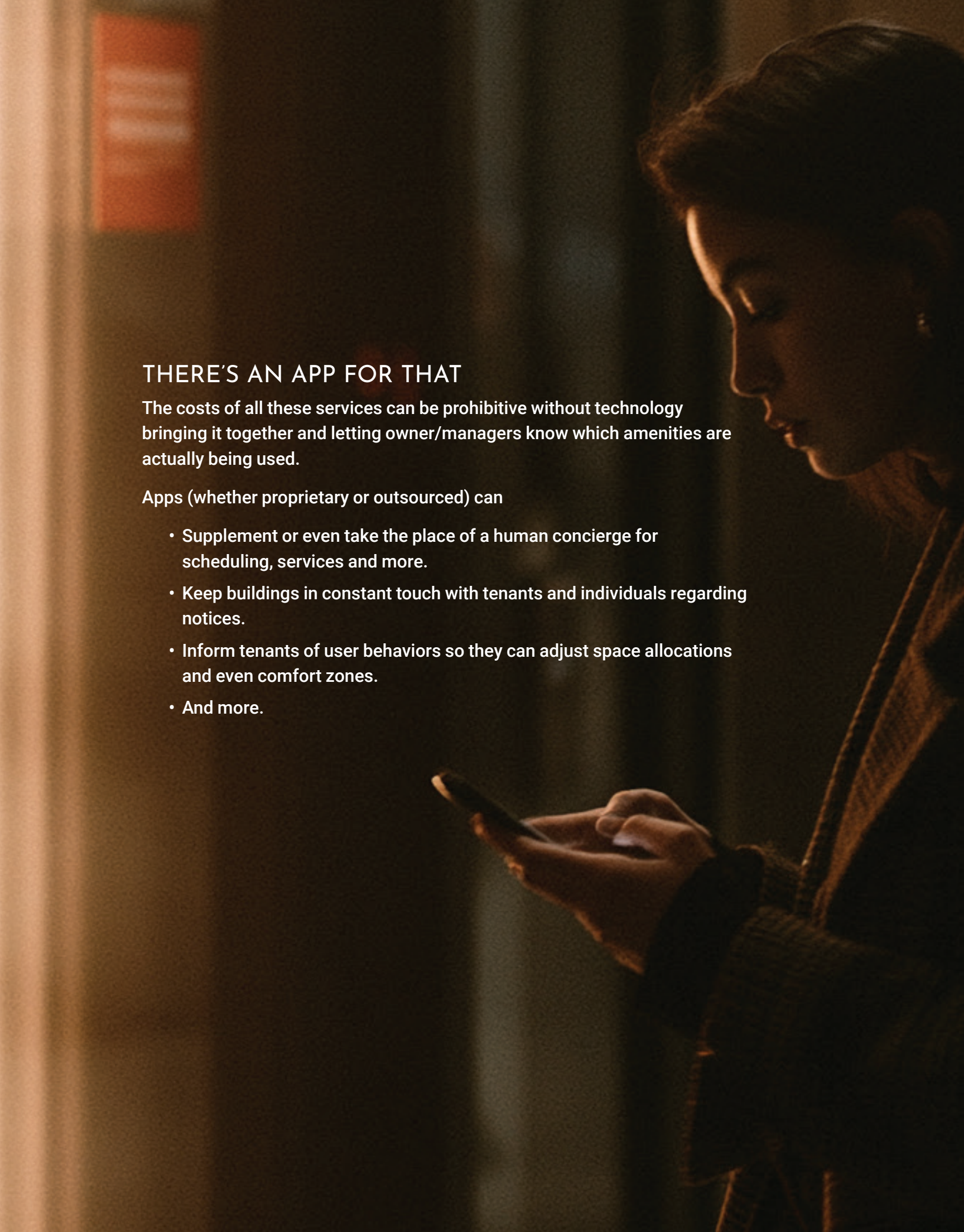
On the landlord side, amenities increasingly are being shown not just to increase rent, but to boost occupancy. Altus Group reports that newer buildings rich with amenities in New York City generated around 2.5 times the NOI of older, lesser buildings.

A recent MIT Center for Real Estate Research paper noted that a “1-point increase in tenant satisfaction (on a Likert scale of 1 to 5) is associated with an 8.6% higher willingness to renew the lease, an 11.5% higher likelihood to recommend the property to prospective tenants, and a 14.6% lower probability of moving out of the property.”¹⁰

In addition, the paper noted, a 10% higher building satisfaction is associated with a 0.2% increase in gross rents “Where amenity improvement was once a rent-increasing strategy (and still is to some extent for A+ buildings), today its real value lies in doing what you can to improve leasing in a down market.”¹¹

But different types of amenities can make money. A “High Performance Building” that is designed to enhance employee experience in terms of health and comfort can result in productivity increases of up to 9% and up to a 10% reduction in separation rates.¹²

But amenities are expensive, and costs continue to rise. A 10,000-square-foot fitness facility that cost \$140 per square foot to \$178 per square foot to construct in 2018 now costs \$155 per square foot to \$210 per square foot today. Building a 5,000-square-foot kitchen area now costs \$162 per square foot to \$241 per square foot, up from \$157 per square foot to \$208 per square foot in 2018, noted Lumicre.¹³

A woman with dark hair is shown in profile, looking down at a smartphone she is holding in her hands. The scene is dimly lit with warm, golden light, possibly from a window or a lamp, creating a soft glow on her face and the phone. The background is dark and out of focus, with a hint of an orange light source on the left.

THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT

The costs of all these services can be prohibitive without technology bringing it together and letting owner/managers know which amenities are actually being used.

Apps (whether proprietary or outsourced) can

- Supplement or even take the place of a human concierge for scheduling, services and more.
- Keep buildings in constant touch with tenants and individuals regarding notices.
- Inform tenants of user behaviors so they can adjust space allocations and even comfort zones.
- And more.



"The workplace is now a seamless blend of physical and digital," Gensler observed. "Sensors, platforms, and wearables create experiences that anticipate workers' needs so smoothly, they'll forget about the underlying technology."¹⁴

WHO'S IN CHARGE

Some property managers have absorbed these costs, while others roll fees into common area maintenance charges, as they operate these facilities themselves. However, given the growing complexity of occupiers' demands, some landlords are now looking to outsource wellness amenities or even entire experiences to specialty companies.

"The challenge now isn't whether to maintain tenant experience. It's how to balance it with efficiency in a way that strengthens leasing and long-term asset value. CRE firms want to maintain connection and community while controlling costs. That's exactly where outsourcing fits," Tom Larance, president and CEO of amenity consultancy The Experience Group, told Bisnow in October 2025.



CONCLUSION

It's clear that employees no longer want to be treated as cogs in a machine — they want to feel at home wherever they are. They want their environments to help them be more productive by offering amenities and services that prioritize collaboration, wellness, and convenience. Doing so within a prescribed budget can help office owners and managers create a happier, busier, more profitable building.

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