

# Have A Seat

**When considering purchasing pre-owned furniture or reusing existing items, there are pros and cons.**

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With an eye toward cost savings and sustainability, many organizations today are deciding to purchase pre-owned furniture or reuse their existing items in a renovation or relocation. Companies are more financially judicious in these tough economic times, and new furniture can be cost prohibitive. Even companies that traditionally bought new furniture for new space are considering reupholstering their quality pieces. Before facility managers (fms) decide to purchase pre-owned furniture for their next projects however, they should weigh the pros and cons. Here are some points to consider.

## Match Furniture To The Project

Pre-owned furniture can encompass chairs, file cabinets, desks, office suites, and workstations, but the size and scope of a given project will dictate the feasibility of using pre-owned furniture. The larger the project, the less likely pre-owned furniture will be an option because of available quantity. It's rare to find 1000 items of the same chair, for example, so larger Class A office projects tend to not participate in the used furniture realm. New furniture can be obtained in unlimited quantities, often at aggressive pricing by eager manufacturers.

For smaller projects (like a 15,000 square foot or smaller office, for example), pre-owned furniture is becoming more common and can reduce the project's furniture budget significantly. Buying used can offer an especially good deal in this market, as companies downsize and make high quality and relatively new system furniture available. Buying used furniture from a local dealer can also work better with a tight project



There are a variety of choices on the market for facility managers seeking to purchase pre-owned furniture. Another way to save money and resources is to evaluate existing furniture assets for reupholstery and other upgrades.

schedule, as the used market is a “cash and carry” type of proposition.

Fms can also earn LEED points for a building project when purchasing pre-owned furniture—or reusing furniture from a previous location. The LEED rating system's Materials & Resources 3.3 credit, for instance, can be earned for “Resource Reuse, 30% Furniture & Furnishings.” An additional Innovation in Design credit can be achieved if a minimum of 60% or greater is documented as reused. The items that can be included in these percentages are fabrics, file cabinets, casework, window treatments, panels and dividers, furniture, furniture systems, furniture accessories, floor mats and walk off mats, seating, and planters. Calculations are based upon the replacement value of the reused furniture and furnishings divided by the total value of new and reused furniture and furnishings.

Because of the current state of the economy, the supply of used furniture right now is plentiful, and the demand is greater than it has ever been. There's a lot to choose from; however, it is a commodity market—here today, gone tomorrow. Time and effort is required to identify and locate the right materials, but fms should be ready to pull the trigger quickly on a purchase when the right items are found.

## Look For Quality

Creative fms can use pre-owned furniture to create a new look with a mix of new and used pieces, or update the look of used pieces by changing out the fabrics. The age of used furniture does not matter, but the condition does. Above all else, buyers should seek quality in the used market. Solid wood furniture might

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look dated or tired, but it can be refinished and remain attractive and functional for years. A well constructed chair can be reupholstered. No amount of refinishing can make up for shoddy construction, however. While a new conference chair with good quality fabric can retail for over \$1,000, a high quality used chair can be reupholstered for \$200 to \$300, depending on the type and quantity of fabric and difficulty of labor.

An international financial services company in Boston moved into new space and took from its previous location furniture that was recently purchased and still in good working condition. Some of the conference room and task chairs were reused; others were reupholstered. Soft lounge seating was also reupholstered, and handsome wood conference room tables and credenzas were reused in the new space. If starting with a high quality product, significant savings—and a distinct design aesthetic—can be achieved through reuse.

### “Buyer Beware”

While the financial and environmental benefits of buying used furniture are irrefutable, fms should be aware that doing so comes with some risk, if due diligence is not conducted.

For conference room furniture, for instance, fms should be aware that older conference room tables may not accommodate newer audiovisual technology, such as tabletop outlets and controls. Cabling connections within these tables to the floor might not be up to date, and a change in table pedestal or cutting a hole in the table might be necessary. Audiovisual technology changes quickly, so buyers should be sure to check technical requirements before deciding to use an older model conference table.

Pre-owned furniture also needs to fit into a space for which it wasn't designed. For example, 8'x8' workstations may fit in some areas but not very well in others,



PHOTO: STOCKBYTE  
Purchasing pre-owned furniture for a space keeps those materials out of a landfill, and it also saves money.

especially when aisle widths are considered. Older workstations will likely have higher panels, which present a problem for offices with low silled windows or collaborative work environments.

KeyPoint Partners, a full service real estate company, used a blend of new and refinished furniture as well as other new items for its renovated and expanded office in Burlington, MA. The company purchased pre-owned enclosed offices, refurbished its existing workstations, and purchased new chairs and workstations to match the existing stock.

During the course of construction in the company's new space, it was discovered that the height of the existing workstation panels would block outside views once windowsills were lowered. Rather than buy new workstation panels, the company decided to have the frames of the workstations cut down to meet the new sill height. While not standard practice, the solution avoided the expense of buying additional lower paneled workstations, and it was completed quickly.

Another consideration with pre-owned furniture is that “the look is the look,” meaning that the style of pre-owned furniture may not fit with an organization's image. The style of office furniture has evolved somewhat in the last few years, with workstation panels going lower, work chairs being lighter, and conference room chairs featuring less leather and more open back and lightweight mesh. Fms should choose pre-owned furniture carefully, and,

again, look for quality pieces with plenty of life still in them.

Pre-owned furniture may or may not come with warranties, so buyers should ask about this before purchasing if that is an important selling point to them. While most used furniture does not come with warranties, fms should make sure the companies that do offer it are able to support the warranty financially for the designated period.

Finally, pre-owned furniture may be difficult to use in some cities because of strict fire codes. In Boston, for example, all purchased pre-owned furniture—as well as furniture to be relocated—need to have fire certificates ensuring that the pieces meet the Standard Cal-133 for fire safety.

As of February 2011, any upholstered furniture in an office setting in Boston must have a fire certificate, even if a company is simply moving their own furniture from Location A to Location B. This new requirement will make it harder to reuse furniture in downtown Boston, as it requires companies to dig up old certificates or submit a sample piece for a burn test—a process that could take up to six weeks. Fms should be aware of their own local fire codes in regard to pre-owned furniture, since other cities have similar ordinances in place.

Buying pre-owned furniture requires smart shopping and a knowledgeable fm who will check for quality, condition, and future use potential. Like any other major purchase, fms should know what they are buying and ask questions. And, they should also remember to test the chairs for comfort. **TFM**

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What considerations have you taken into account when evaluating furniture reuse? Send your thoughts to [avazquez@groupc.com](mailto:avazquez@groupc.com).