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Coalesse® Conducts Research on Nomadic Work

Key learnings outline necessity for designing spaces that support mobile workforce

San Francisco, CA – Since its inception in 2008, Coalesse, the leader in crossover furnishings, has designed solutions - furniture and accessories aimed at the intersection of work and life. To deepen their familiarity with mobility, Coalesse conducted research that shed light on what the mobile worker desires most to seamlessly transition from home to office, and within the office to alternative workspaces like cafes, lobbies, airports and park benches. “There’s a real need to grasp the needs of the ‘other workplace’ – the transitory spaces, the hallways, the break areas, the landscape outside the building, the coffee shop down the street,” says Primo Orpilla, Principal of Studio O+A, a firm that specializes in progressive officing design.

Despite the prevalence of the mobile workforce, formal research on the topic is scarce, prompting Coalesse to conduct its own investigations by going right to the source through discussions with nomadic workers themselves. “Architects and designers are not typically commissioned to do this kind of research, and they rely on the major manufacturers for a more comprehensive perspective on workplace trends. Coalesse is extending its own research focus beyond the traditional work environment and attempting to understand work behaviors in the context of people’s broader lives, including the increasingly nomadic nature of work,” says Robert Arko, Vice President and Creative Director of Coalesse.

In 2010 and 2011, Coalesse took a radical step by following mobile workers everywhere they worked, including their homes, to observe people who are always connected. That initial research confirmed that time pressed workers are constantly toggling back and forth between life and work, but are unsupported ergonomically and emotionally by the spaces and furniture that surrounds them.

Then in 2012, Coalesse extended their research by talking to progressive organizations like Facebook, The Hub, IDEO and others and by recruiting a group of workers to blog constantly for one week through private messages to Coalesse using Tumblr, the micro blogging platform. This unique method of conducting research allowed for a constant stream of messages and images to be shared giving a glimpse into the daily lives of mobile workers and the challenges they face.

The exercise resulted in the discovery that there are three modes of nomadic work: **Micro, Local and Global**. The **Micro mode** describes working mainly in one place – either at home, an office or a client location. Those working in **Local** mode view the whole community or city as their workspace. While the **Global** mode is experienced by classic road warriors, traveling through different time zones with unpredictable work resources.



Beyond the common need for Wi-Fi and power, participants in the research all spoke of the underlying frustration they feel as mobile workers. Compelling points of feedback include:

“Second bed in hotel serves as work surface, work in process suitcase and dresser top”

“The world doesn’t generally accommodate mobile working”

“I think not having any particular working space is more time consuming”

“Need to step away to get some work done...need for a change of scenery...gloomy day and our space isn’t the most inspiring”

Observing the research as a whole, Coalesse identified three key categories that the meaningful market-related insights fell within to pass along to designers:

Space, Tools and Well-being.

Starting with **Space**, hosting amenities are crucial for today’s mobile workforce. This includes being able to touchdown easily somewhere, get connected quickly and depart just as easily. Temporary ownership is another major component of space planning for mobile workers. Not only does the user need to be able to settle into a space easily, but the space also needs to feel comfortable, while catering to both introverted and extroverted work modes. In a given day, most people shift between personal, heads-down or introverted work and collaborative or extroverted work.

The trick is accommodating all these work modes in one place, which requires thinking about the natural flow of a typical workday and the changing modes and moods of workers. Dynamic and flexible workspaces are becoming a necessity.

Designers need to let go of the way a space looks to provide options for the end-users to make those decisions for themselves depending on their needs. This can entail use of mobile and modular tables, chairs, and accessories that allow endless custom configurations along with the ability to stow these items away at a moment’s notice.

The creation of what is known as “moments of serendipity” or “happy accidents” to encourage socializing in the workplace, have become popular in recent years. Rather than leaving these moments to chance, designers actually play a part in catalyzing them by creating intentional breakout areas such as café like settings within the workplace. Companies also facilitate interaction by hosting events ranging from specialized group activities to free snack time or happy hour gatherings.



The second major element of the nomadic framework involves the **Tools** of mobility, brought on by increased connectivity and the prevalence of personal computing devices and other advancements in technology. In the same way that mobile workers need spaces that enhance their productivity, their tools need proper accommodation as well. More touchdown points for laptops and tablets are needed as well as Wi-Fi and access to power through conveniently located outlets. Since nomads often carry their offices and personal items with them, there's a major need for short-term storage while working in the office.

The third category is **Well-being**, which is primarily about two things: comfort (both physical and emotional) and quality of experience. In the digitally connected age, work is often intensely focused, but done in a wide variety of postures. Product designers need to anticipate users sitting, reclining, leaning forward, or standing.

On an emotional level, mobile workers often may need a respite, a place to rest or simply just a change of scenery. In our always-connected society, mobile workers sometimes require less distraction to lift their spirits or enhance creativity.

To address this, designers need to consider dedicating space in or around the office for nomads to escape or unplug. In addition to the "unplugged zone" concept, outdoor refreshment has been shown to increase productivity and can raise quality of experience considerably. Independent studies conducted by U.S. companies have concluded that productivity increases by as much as 15% from exposing employees to more natural light. And a University of Kansas professor found that a focus group's creativity was recharged by 50% just from backpacking for four days in the wilderness.

Considering all of its collected research, Coalesse believes it is crucial to think in between -- not only working and living -- but also between the obvious and not-so-obvious solutions for our growing population of mobile workers. In using this and future research, Coalesse will build their understanding of workers' relationships to their work spaces and tools and will continue to design inventive solutions that remain ahead of the curve to support the new work day.

For more information on Coalesse and its products, visit www.coalesse.com.

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About Coalesse

Coalesse is an award-winning brand of furnishings that expresses the new freedom of work. It is part of the rapidly growing category we call Crossover. The crossovers are homes and offices, meeting rooms and social spaces, private retreats and public places — the fluid intersections of work and life where boundaries are collapsing and creativity is roaming.

We study the new work day, how people are collaborating, contemplating, and socializing at work. Then we ask some of the world's most talented designers to create artful solutions that combine comfort, function, and emotional satisfaction. For our end-user customers, Coalesse helps graciously integrate work and the rest of life. Wherever you are inspired to work, however you get things done, Coalesse is designed to improve your day.

Coalesse – For the new work day.

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