Maptician CEO On Law Firm Office Design In The Hybrid Era

By **Steven Lerner**

Law360 (September 7, 2022, 12:31 PM EDT) -- As more attorneys today favor hybrid work, some law firms are adapting their existing office space and return-to-office strategies with technologies that optimize hybrid office designs.

Alaa Pasha is the chief executive officer for Maptician, a hybrid office software company that just released a visualization tool called Scenario Planning that helps firms create new seating arrangements, furniture layouts, schedules and architectures to transform today's office spaces.

Here, Pasha wrote to Law360 Pulse via email about law firm office design in the hybrid era, common mistakes that law firms make in their return-to-office plans and the future of hybrid law firm office spaces.

This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

Alaa Pasha

What do law firms want in their offices in 2022?

With many businesses, including law firms, required to work remotely during the pandemic, combined with today's major shift in the workplace, law firms are looking for a sustainable return to office, or RTO, strategy that can help them bring their staff back to the office and keep them engaged and collaborative while offering some flexibility to working remote.

When lawyers do choose to come into the office, they want to be with their peers, connect, collaborate, and spend time with mentors. Law firms should be prioritizing how to make that happen.

What exactly is important to keep in mind with law firm office design in this hybrid era?

The biggest change when moving to hybrid is the fact that not everyone will be in the office every day and most likely desks and offices will be dynamic as well.

This requires designing the office to drive and encourage collaboration and requires the use of tools to provide the capabilities to know who's in the office, where people sit and what days people are expected to be in the office.

Also, it is strongly recommended to right-size the office space when moving to a hybrid model. Firms are likely to need less space, so having too much space may lead to uncomfortably empty spaces that do not encourage and drive the desired level of collaboration.

What are the common mistakes that law firms make in their return-to-office plans?

1. The lack of a hybrid strategy.

Given the number of firms that have already transitioned to hybrid and those in the process of transitioning, we believe that having a hybrid working strategy is essential to maintaining a high level

of staff retention and overall attorney satisfaction.

2. Not using the proper tools.

Managing a hybrid environment requires the use of software and technology to enable the transition and facilitation of day-to-day operations. If you have 100 employees and an office with a seating capacity of 60 employees, you will need software to ensure the proper scheduling of employees based on the seating capacity. Given the variability of the employees' in-office schedule and the flexibility of where they sit, a tool that shows who's in the office, when and where they sit is critical to a successful transition.

3. Failing to fine-tune office plans.

Hybrid is a journey, not a destination. When implementing hybrid for the first time in your firm, it is likely to require some fine-tuning and adjustment to fit your firm's culture and the way you work. We strongly recommend that firms use analytics from their hybrid software tool, in addition to keeping an open channel of communication for employee feedback.

How will hybrid law firm office spaces evolve in the next five years? What about 10 years?

Over the next five to 10 years, hybrid work will become mainstream, which will drive more emphasis on employee engagement and ensuring that the organization is connecting with its employees.

Keeping employees connected and fully engaged in a hybrid environment could be challenging and will require the use of technology to enable and encourage collaboration and employee engagement.

It is also expected that the labor shortage will continue to be a challenge. This will require firms to be more competitive in their employee benefits offering and flexibility.

--Editing by Alyssa Miller.