

# The Rise of the Huddle Room

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Businesses today are moving away from large conference rooms and toward technology-based spaces where small groups can meet and share ideas.

With business today moving at 100 MB per second or faster, companies are shedding the stodgy, slow-changing ways of the past in favor of a nimble approach where ideas are developed quickly and creativity is the new currency.

Nowhere is that shift more evident than at the corporate office. Instead of large conference rooms where ideas are presented to the board and discussed endlessly in committees, companies are adopting the use of smaller “huddle rooms” where small groups can hash out and refine ideas for quick implementation.

But what exactly is a huddle room? For the most part, it depends on who you ask, but there are some general concepts on which most people agree.

“I see a huddle room as some place, where three to six or seven people can get together, and either study or collaborate to solve whatever problem they’re working on,” said Ben Hardy, product manager for large screen displays with Chicago-based display manufacturer NEC Display Solutions.

“It likely includes a large screen and ways for people to easily connect to that screen,” Hardy said. “The goal of a huddle space is to have a way to use technology to easily be able to discuss a problem.”

## What’s the use?

How many huddle rooms are being used in the business world is difficult to quantify, but a 2015 study by Duxbury, Massachusetts-based Wainhouse Research estimates the number at about 50 million, with 30 million in the United States alone.

Considering that the concept of huddle rooms was relatively unheard of just a few years ago, those rooms are obviously filling a need.

“There are still places for large conference rooms, but those are better suited for broader discussions,” Hardy said.



“If you have a lot of people, you have a lot of opinions,” Hardy said. “Huddle rooms are really better suited to having micro-level discussions and trying to refine ideas.”

There are a number of factors driving the popularity of huddle rooms. In addition to the need for quick decision-making and project implementation to keep a business ahead of the competition, one of the main drivers is the cost of real estate.

According to Chicago-based real estate consultant Cushman and Wakefield, the average annual rent for office space in the third quarter of 2016 was \$29.45 per square foot, up 5.5 percent compared with the same period in 2015. For tech-focused San Francisco, annual rents are a whopping \$69.21 per square foot.

At those prices, a 20-foot-by-40-foot conference room in a San Francisco office costs a business more than \$55,000 a year. So unless that room is being used on a daily basis, much of that cost is wasted. A smaller, 12-foot by 12-foot huddle room being used on a daily basis, on the other hand, can save that business more than \$45,000 a year.

Another driver of huddle rooms is the growing number of employees who telecommute. According to Carlsbad, California-based Global Workplace Analytics, the number of employees who work from home, excluding the self-employed, has grown by 103 percent since 2005. More than 3.7 million employees now work from home at least half the time.

It’s important, then, for companies to not only have spaces for those workers to use when they do come in to the office, but also to have the ability to teleconference in to small group meetings.

And if a group of employees need to give a presentation to a client or upper level management in an intimate setting, a huddle room can be a place to do so.

## Huddle room best practices

**Room design:** Huddle rooms are designed for simplicity; a small table, comfortable chairs and adequate lighting. Beyond that, designers should consider incorporating carpeting and wall coverings made to reduce noise.

**Technology:** Huddle room displays can range in size from a 55-inch display to an 80-inch screen or larger. For those with the need for a larger image, a projector may be in order. Speakerphones and/or speakers connected to the display as well as a camera are a must for those who plan to use those rooms for teleconferencing. And convenient power outlets are a necessity for meetings that may last longer than a device's battery.

**Connectivity:** Hard wired connections are quickly becoming a thing of the past, with WiFi taking its place. It's important to realize, though, that laptops are being replaced by tablets, and many workers are using their smartphone as their primary digital device. In today's huddle room it's important to have a way for users to have a collaborative solution to quickly move content from their device to the huddle room display. NEC's DS1-MP10RX1 MultiPresenter Stick, for example, allows for the connection of up to 12 devices simultaneously to any projector or display with a HDMI input.

## Putting the pieces together

Huddle rooms are all about small groups gathering together to work on solving a problem or developing a new idea, and the glue that holds the concept of a huddle room together is the technology.

Most of us have dealt with the frustration of having several people gathered around a laptop, looking over each other's shoulders in an effort to view a presentation. In light of that, the key focus of a huddle room will be the display.



"Whether that's projection, or whether that's a display really depends on the company and their preferences," Hardy said. "Either one will work because they're going to be serving the same purpose."

If teleconferencing will be part of the huddle room function, then speakers, a speakerphone, microphones and cameras need to be part of the package as well.

But as many workers abandon laptops and desktop computers in favor of "Bring-Your-Own-Device" options such as tablets and smartphones, getting the maximum value from a huddle room requires a way to get content from those devices to the screen.

A number of solutions have been developed recently to help solve that issue. NEC, for example, has introduced the MultiPresenter Stick (Part number: DS1-MP10RX1), a wireless presenting solution for use with NEC's projectors and large format displays that connects directly into an HDMI® port on the product and allows as many as 12 users to wirelessly and simultaneously share information with one another on a single screen.

"With this technology it becomes very simple to share information from people in the same room," Hardy said. "This allows for quick and simple collaboration across multiple devices which, in turn, can allow for more effective and efficient huddle spaces."