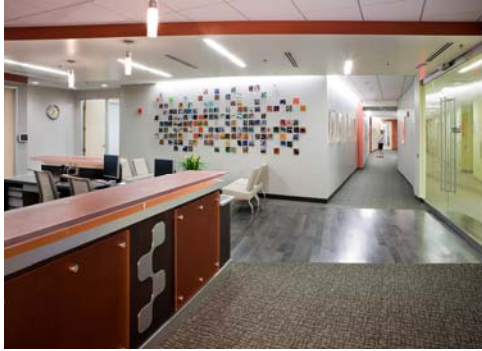


Acquiring Corporate Artwork on a Budget

By Dorie Weintraub, AIA, LEED AP, IIDA



Sapient's reception area creatively displays employee-generated artwork and offers a glimpse of the company's gallery space. The corridor has space for video screens on one side and the gallery on the other side.

Companies of all sizes desire to make their spaces comfortable and attractive to employees and clients. Artwork can humanize the scale of a large space, express the personality of the company, and add visual interest to an office. During these tough economic times, however, acquiring art for the corporate office may fall low on the budget priority list. How can a company bring artwork into its space on a limited budget? What are the guidelines for buying or borrowing artwork that everyone can enjoy?

Even in this difficult economic climate, four viable options exist to bring artwork into a space. In the following case studies, these companies weren't focused solely on cost-conscious solutions at the time, but their strategies work now more than ever.

Purchasing Artwork

One approach to displaying art in the office is to tap the company's art collection and select pieces to hang on the wall. Many companies, not just large corporations, have their own art collections, acquired as investments or to fill empty walls. Often, companies will display pieces from their executives' personal collections. It is also common for companies to purchase artwork as part of an interior re-design, as in the case of eSecLending, a Boston-based provider and administrator of customized securities lending programs. When eSecLending moved into its newly-designed space in 2004, the firm purchased artwork by Boston-based artists that appealed to the executive team and complemented its new space.

Corporate Art on a Budget



The artwork in Nuvera's entry lobby is from the company's collection. Nuvera's executive waiting area (outside the boardroom) displays pieces from the DeCordova Museum's Corporate Program

Alternately, an art consultant can be hired to collaborate with the interior designer and the client to select choice pieces that complement the office design and corporate identity or culture. (eSecLending used the consultant Boston Art for many purchases.) Art consultants can provide a valuable service for companies with limited budgets, as they can acquire less expensive prints as well as original pieces. Some art museums also provide a similar consulting service, or better, offer a lending program to take "purchasing" out of the equation. Many smaller museums, and even public libraries, now

offer corporate art lending programs in exchange for financial support of the organization's mission.

Alternative energy company Nuvera Fuel Cells in Billerica, Mass., recently transformed a former warehouse space by scaling it down to create offices, laboratory space and a manufacturing floor. Nuvera's expansive 16-ft. ceilings were made more intimate with architectural elements that divide it into smaller open spaces, and the addition of contemporary art from the DeCordova complements the interior design and provides visual interest.

Host a Local Artist

Hosting a local artist and showcasing his/her work in a company's gallery-ready space can be another option for acquiring artwork on a budget. This arrangement provides artwork to grace the company's walls, exposure of the art to a greater audience, and possible sales opportunities for the artist.

When global consulting firm Sapient relocated its world headquarters to Boston, the company desired an open floor plan with a series of office neighborhoods connected by a major path that matched its collaborative and flexible work approach. A section of the path is specially lit on one side with gallery lighting. Sapient took advantage of this lighting to display artwork by a local artist, who was invited to showcase her work just weeks after the company moved into its new space. Sapient polled its own staff and client community on the idea of a "resident artist," and was inundated with responses. The company has hung new shows quarterly.

Tap Your Hidden Talents

The best source for conversation-inspiring art may be works created by a company's own employees. Inviting staff to contribute art, sculpture or writing pieces and creating a wall for displaying it not only provides visual interest in the office space, but also supports employees' creativity and adds to the corporate culture. Sapient did just that, by editing and formatting employees' submissions into 4-in. by 4-in. squares that were mounted in a random pattern on the wall in the new reception area. The "employee art wall" continues to be a hit for staff and visitors alike.

What better way to acquire meaningful artwork while introducing your company and the creative people who work for it?

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Photos by Warren Patterson