

CASE STUDY: Sound Masking in an Office Without Private Offices or Cubicles



The Bridgespan Group

Photo credit: © Anton Grass/Esto

Challenge

Reducing Distractions and Protecting Speech Privacy in an Open-Concept Space

When the Bridgespan Group, a non-profit consultant group for philanthropists and mission-driven organizations, moved to a new 28,000 square foot, one floor location, they saw an opportunity to do something completely different with their office space and the way they worked. One aspirational value of the Bridgespan culture is collaboration—employees work in close-knit teams and the company leadership feels every person has valuable contributions to make. As a result, they wanted a completely open office that was a physical representation of their collaborative spirit. The goal was to design a dramatically different kind of office that would enhance interpersonal interaction and provide a variety of workspace choices for all staff every day while simultaneously keeping costs down.

All employees were invited to participate in the visioning of the new office project, and after numerous brainstorming sessions and a lot of research, a plan for a truly open office emerged. The new office would not have assigned seats, rather, everyone would have a place to store their personal belongings and choose where they wanted to sit throughout the day. At the heart of the office there would be a space with movable tables, sofas, and white boards where teams could meet and discuss work previously done in closed conference rooms. There would be several small comfortable seating clusters throughout the office for small-group conversations, and also sitting and standing work stations for individuals. Those looking for a more private setting could move to the “library” where there would be no conversations or cellphone use. There would be a bank of small private rooms for people to use when they truly needed privacy for meetings, phone calls, or individual work, but there would be no private offices – even for the most senior staff. Conference rooms would have glass walls so meetings could be seen by everyone.

With such a bold vision came privacy and noise concerns. A completely open office space with no cubicle partitions or walls to block sound would mean that speech privacy would be compromised and noise distractions would be elevated. How could Bridgespan retain their open concept vision but also create an acoustically comfortable environment? How could they ensure that teams did not distract one another while working on separate projects? How could they ensure that conversations in conference rooms and private rooms would not be overheard?

“ Sound masking helped make our open office concept work. Teams can collaborate out in the open near other teams and employees without being overly distracting. We’re pleased with what the system has done for us. ”

Charles Lee
Director of Information Services
The Bridgespan Group

Solution

QtPro™ Sound Masking System

The Bridgespan Group asked their property managers, Cresa Partners, for potential solutions to office noise problems. Cresa suggested that Bridgespan consider introducing sound masking to the space. Sound masking is the process of adding a low level, unobtrusive background sound to an environment to reduce the intelligibility of human speech and reduce noise distractions. By making nearby conversations unintelligible, sound masking protects speech privacy and allows individuals to work more productively in a space with fewer noise distractions. Sound masking is more cost effective than other acoustical treatments such as partitions or soundproofing materials.

Integrator Connectivity Point won the bid to install Bridgespan's sound masking. Small, barely visible emitters (speakers) were installed in the open ceiling and drop ceiling areas throughout the open-office space and the designated private areas. The emitters were connected by cables to a QtPro control module residing in the server room. Connectivity Point and Bridgespan worked together on a wiring plan that could facilitate potential zoning changes later on. The system was also configured to act as a docking station for music devices so that Bridgespan could play the music of their choice over the emitters during events and get-togethers.

Result

An Open Office Plan that Actually Worked

Bridgespan was able to create an open office environment that's both beautiful and functional. Office chatter from team projects is not distracting to employees and groups in other parts of the office. The "library" remains quiet and unaffected by noise in the adjoining open area. Furthermore, private conversations in the private rooms and conference rooms are not overheard by employees in the open area.

About The Bridgespan Group

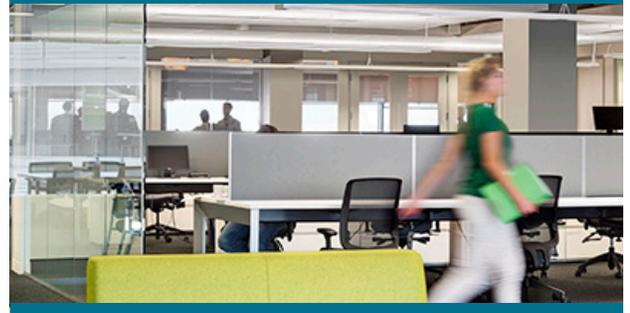
The Bridgespan Group is a nonprofit advisor and resource for mission-driven organizations and philanthropists. They collaborate with social sector leaders to help scale impact, build leadership, advance philanthropic effectiveness and accelerate learning. Bridgespan works on issues related to society's most important challenges and to break cycles of intergenerational poverty. Their services include strategy consulting, leadership development, philanthropy advising, and developing and sharing practical insights.

About Cambridge Sound Management

Cambridge Sound Management, Inc. manufactures QtPro sound masking systems to help organizations across multiple industries protect speech privacy, reduce noise distractions, and fuel workplace productivity. Powered by direct-field Quiet Technology, QtPro works by emitting a uniform, barely perceptible background sound at the frequencies of human speech. Cost effective and easy to install, QtPro is deployed in hundreds of millions of square feet of space throughout the world including commercial organizations, healthcare facilities, financial services, government agencies, and educational institutions.

About Connectivity Point

Connectivity Point specializes in integrated technology solutions for voice, data, video and security applications. They have specific expertise in structured cabling and wireless connectivity, security systems, audio visual equipment, VOIP telephone systems and sound masking solutions. Connectivity Point services the New England area with their own technicians, and nationally and globally through a network of pre-qualified partners, enabling Connectivity Point to be their clients' One Point of contact.



Case Study Overview

SPACE

28,000 square feet of open office space across one floor, with both open ceiling and drop ceiling areas.

CHALLENGE

How do you make a truly collaborative, open-office space but reduce excess noise and protect speech privacy?

SOLUTION

Qt 600 Sound Masking System



RESULT

An efficient and collaborative work space that stayed true to Bridgespan's modern open office vision.