The Ultimate Guide to Defining Agile Seating
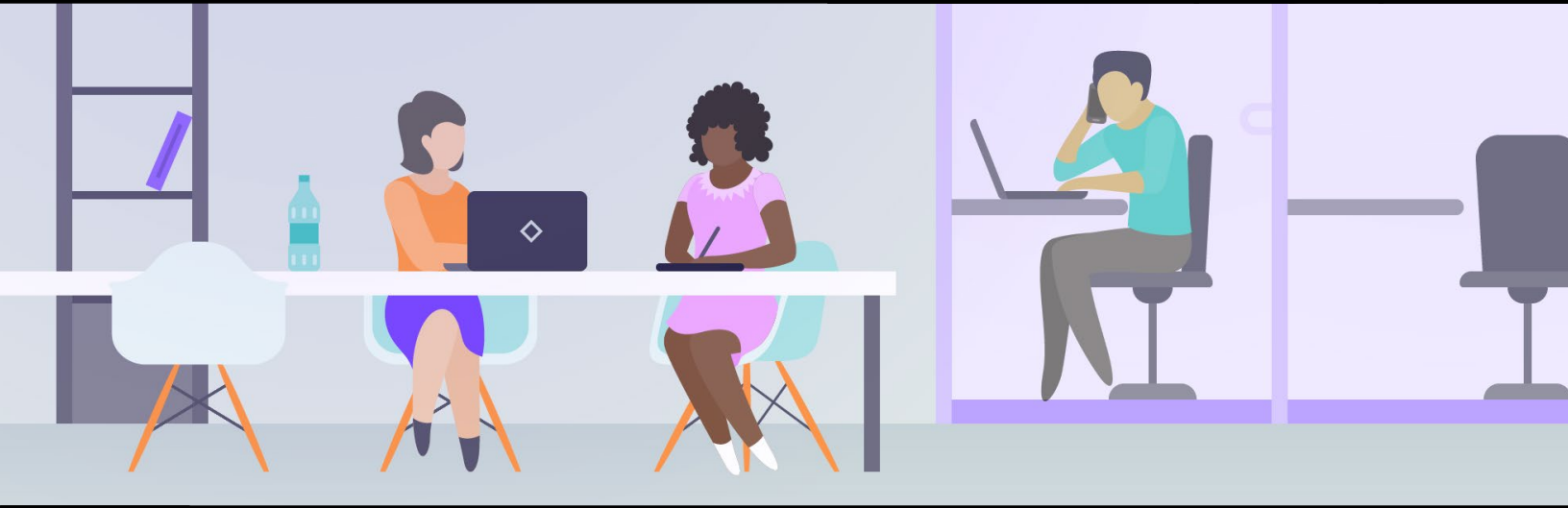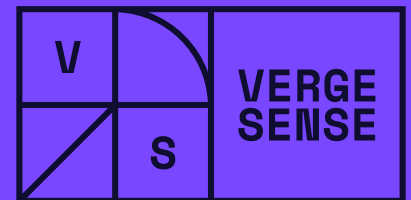
How the Right Technology Powers Resilient CRE Strategies, Office Reentry Initiatives, and more

VERGE SENSE

As the realities of the workplace continue to evolve, one thing is clear:

Whatever your pre-COVID workplace strategy was, it's now obsolete.

So, where do you go from here?

This is a chance to incorporate fluidity and flexibility to future-proof your workplace design in the long term.

To help you in this process, this guide will illustrate how VergeSense data readings are showing early signs of a trend towards agile seating.

From there, we'll explore how occupancy sensors can help as you develop an unassigned seating plan — and which technology you should consider as you evaluate solutions.
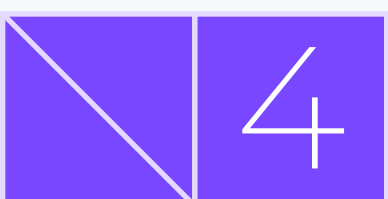
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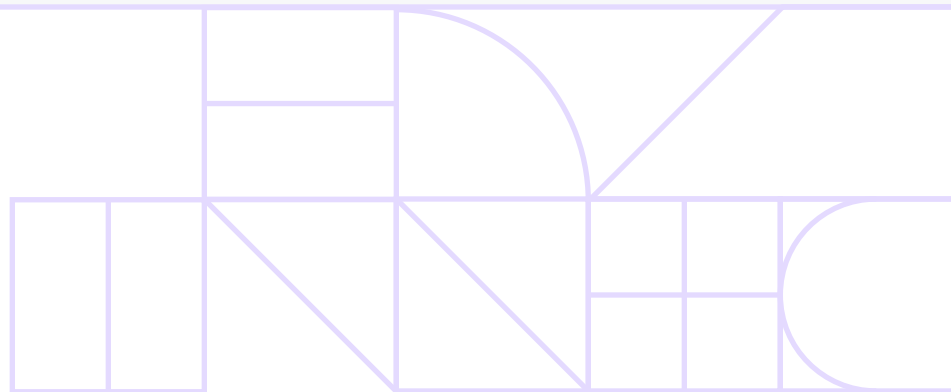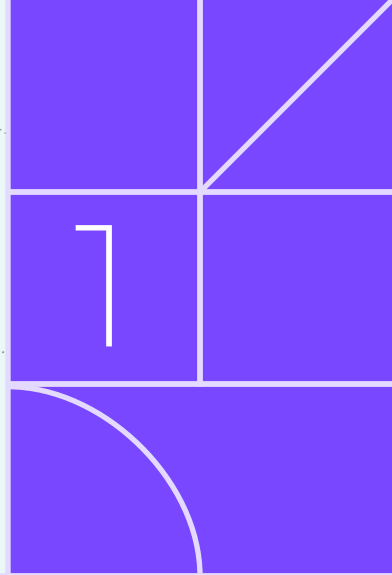
Agile Workspaces Are Speeding Up

COVID-19 has thrust the CRE industry into another transformative era.

The pandemic has sparked a momentous shift in how people work and stay safe simultaneously, causing C-suites to reflect on how they'll support employee productivity and health in the long term, and what the role/purpose of the workplace now is.

At the onset of the crisis, this meant a **mass migration to remote work**. But six months on, and as the fatigue of working from home full-time begins to set in, workplace leaders are laboring to implement return-to-work strategies that meet their employees' new expectations for flexibility and safety.
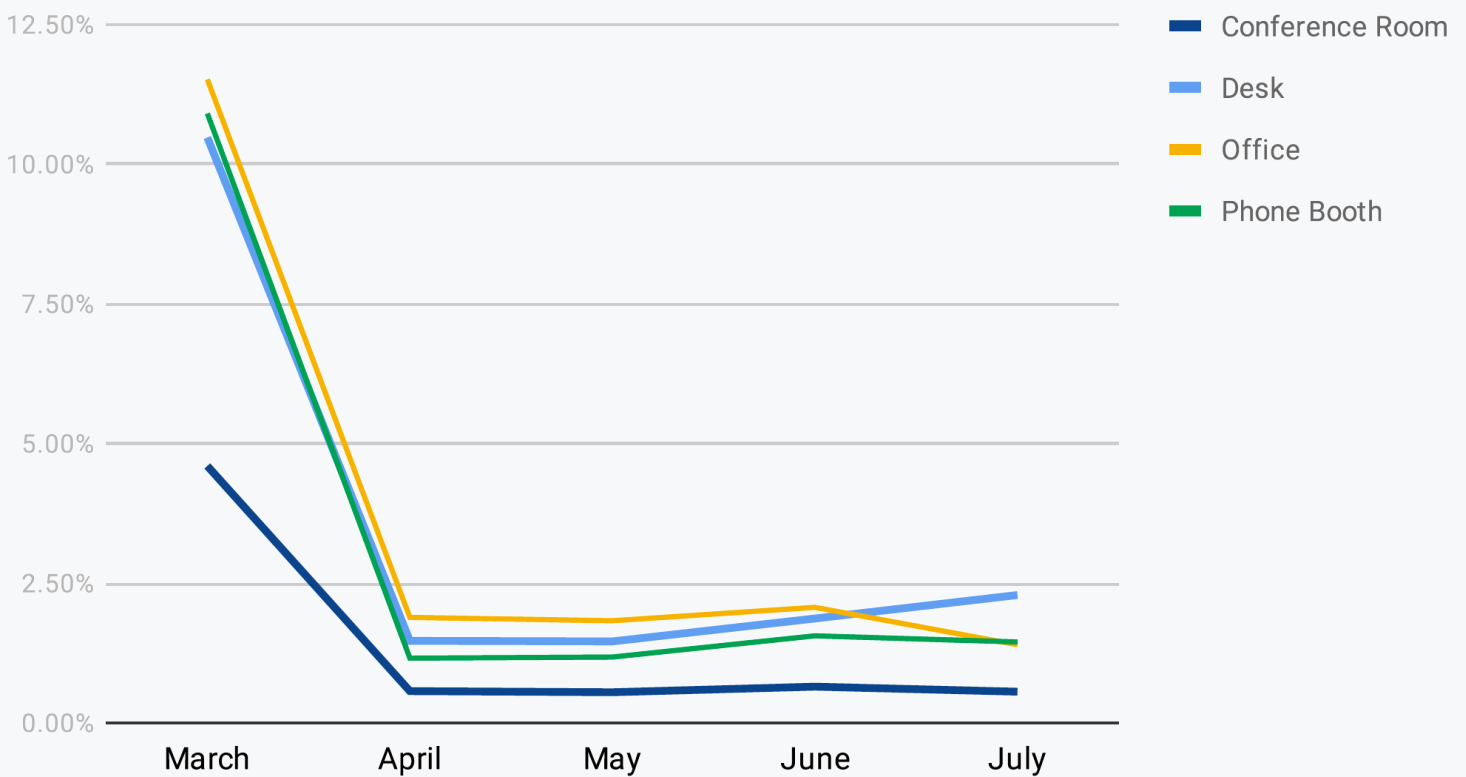
To examine how office utilization has changed since COVID-19 infiltrated news headlines, **VergeSense analyzed data from 20M SQFT of office space** — specifically focusing on how utilization rates for desks, private offices, conference rooms, and phone booths have shifted.

Here's What We Found

Although overall office utilization has struggled to rebound, early signs are pointing to an **increased usage of agile work settings** that offer companies the flexibility they need when headcount changes on a daily basis. The utilization of these types of workspaces is gradually increasing as more employees return to the office. Other workspaces, however, remain stagnant with minimal utilization.

Workspace Utilization March - July

Key Takeaways:

- The utilization of private offices dropped from 28% in February to just over 1.4% in July.

- Traditional conference rooms, which were poorly utilized even before the pandemic, experienced yet another decrease in utilization from 12% in February to 0.6% in the summer months.

- By contrast, desks in open areas are showing slow and steady increase of usage as more employees return to the office.

What these data points tell us is consistent with what we've been hearing from our customers. **As companies recover from COVID-19, they're shifting to a hybrid schedule and more flexible seating plans** that make office re-entry easier and safer, and also optimize the value of CRE in the new normal that follows.

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In the near term: From a safety standpoint, shifting to flexible seating means workplace leaders can realize efficiency while catering to knowledge workers' evolving needs as they choose to return to the workplace. This is because it's a more on-demand approach where employees can book workspace only when needed. Desk reservation systems enable employees to easily reserve a desk online in advance and occupancy sensors make real-time availability visible. This also enables companies to optimize cleaning and sanitization once employees are finished using a space.

In the long term: Many organizations are beginning to see the writing on the wall. Even pre-pandemic, for instance, workplace utilization **hovered around 30%**. Post-pandemic, with many employees likely only going to be office-based 2-3 days per week, we can expect utilization to drop even further.

As a result, companies are looking at consolidating footprints and designing workspace to be more flexible and on-demand, by leveraging occupancy sensor technology and workplace booking systems.

Flexibility is the New Normal

As companies reopen their offices, flexible seating discussions have been heating up and companies clearly see **the economic benefit of more agile workplaces**.

After all, why should employers pay for dedicated desks for every single employee when employees are spending half the week working from home? The new normal is an office that is not just a warehouse of assigned desks, but a haven where employees choose to experience socialization and collaboration with their colleagues. And our data hints at what many are calling the rebirth of the office where CRE leaders get the opportunity to rethink the purpose of the office and design more agile environments that optimize both the employee experience and their RE spend.

Request a Demo

We're dedicated to building software that translates data into real-world insights that make optimizing your workplace easier. Request a demo with us to see the platform in action.

Request a Demo

As the nature of the workspace continues to evolve, read on to find how occupancy sensors can help you optimize your office.

4 Ways Occupancy Sensors Can Help

Based on our workplace utilization data, you can see why companies everywhere are accelerating plans to move to unassigned seating.

But, this shift comes with challenges.

Employees who are used to assigned desks will look for tools to transition to unassigned seating and get reliable real-time data on usage. At a higher level, CRE and WP teams will need to gather data on space utilization and attractiveness to make better-informed decisions.

The solution? **Accurate occupancy sensors that gather real-time information on the ways employees use your workspace.** From comparing reservations to true attendance and calculating a new employee-to-desk ratio, we'll take you through four ways that occupancy sensing platforms, like **VergeSense**, can help.

1 Identify a New Employee-to-Desk Ratio

With companies such as Google, Microsoft, and more officially announcing that partial remote working is part of their new workplace strategy, your business is likely also contemplating how to adapt a hybrid workplace model. No matter what that plan is, however, one fact holds true: **The traditional model of 1 desk for every employee no longer makes sense.** So, what's the new model?

You could create a rough ratio based on the specifics of your work policy. But, even that might not be not be accurate. **You need to calculate that new ratio with real occupancy data**.

Our sensors gather activity-based information, giving you insight into how your workspaces are actually being utilized. **Only with this real-time data on space usage can you validate whether your new model is working for your workforce**. From there, you can make adjustments to approach maximum office space utilization.

2 Optimize Cleaning and Satisfy Employee Concerns

Compared to the assigned desk setup that they're used to, there's a certain unknown factor that comes with working in a space used by any previous employee. **This factor has been multiplied many times over during COVID-19.**

Half of Americans are already reluctant to return to the office at all due to health concerns. If you can't proactively ensure that a workstation is sanitized as soon as it is vacated, employees may reject an unassigned seating plan entirely.

The answer to this requirement is **occupancy sensors**. VergeSense hardware relays information to our analytics dashboard and displays a real-time floor map of your office space, connecting people-counting views and desk reservation together in a Smart Cleaning Planner. Employees can feel at ease knowing that their facilities teams are on top of cleaning and sanitization based on real-time data.
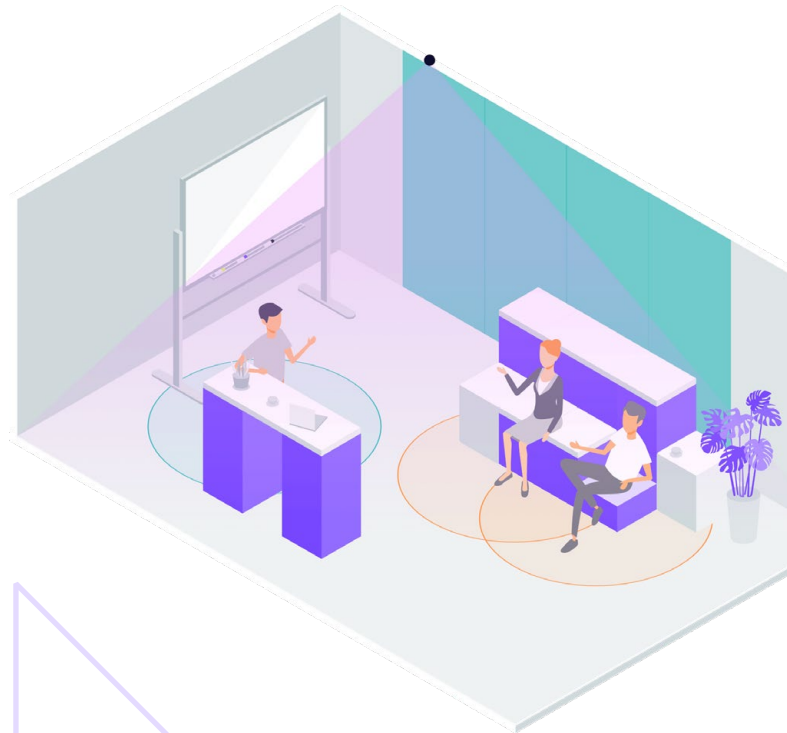
3 Monitor and Optimize Desk Reservation

As you roll out an unassigned seating plan, it's critical to offer an efficient and accurate desk reservation system. Employees need a way to understand the work spaces available during their time in the office so they can claim a desk that fits their ideal environment — whether that's a collaborative space, or a quiet place to get stuff done.

However, simply offering a reservation system isn't enough. **It's common for employees to reserve spaces and not use them.** For example: Based on data that VergeSense collected across 1 million square feet of office space, employees didn't show up to **30% of all conference room bookings in 2018**.

You need to not only provide a reservation tool but **monitor real occupancy**.

If not, you won't get accurate data on desk usage and employees won't be able to find the most productive space to do their work. **VergeSense occupancy sensors** show actual usage at all times, so you can collect your own data and optimize your workspace based on how your employees are actually taking to it.
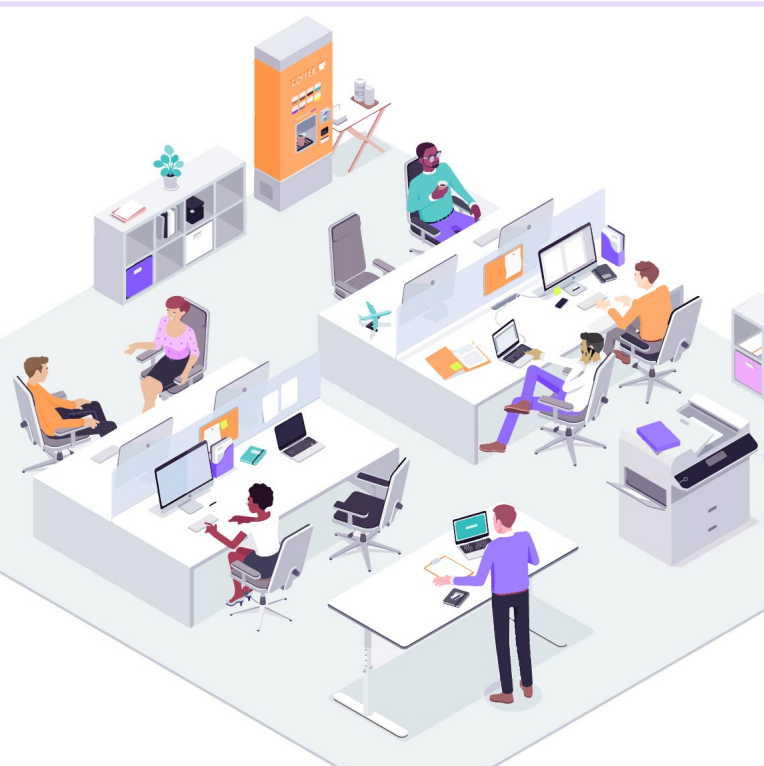
4 Offer a Better Employee Experience

An unassigned seating plan is undoubtedly a cost-effective move for your organization. However, the success of that plan depends entirely on the technology you'll choose to implement and your internal communications plan. If you don't offer tools to ease the transition, you'll lose buy-in from your workforce.

Employee-facing applications such as desk booking software and room displays can remove some of the natural friction. Once these are in place, you'll find that satisfaction will likely increase. When we **conducted a survey** of employees across various office environments, **those in agile workplaces were most likely to say that their current setup was their ideal.**
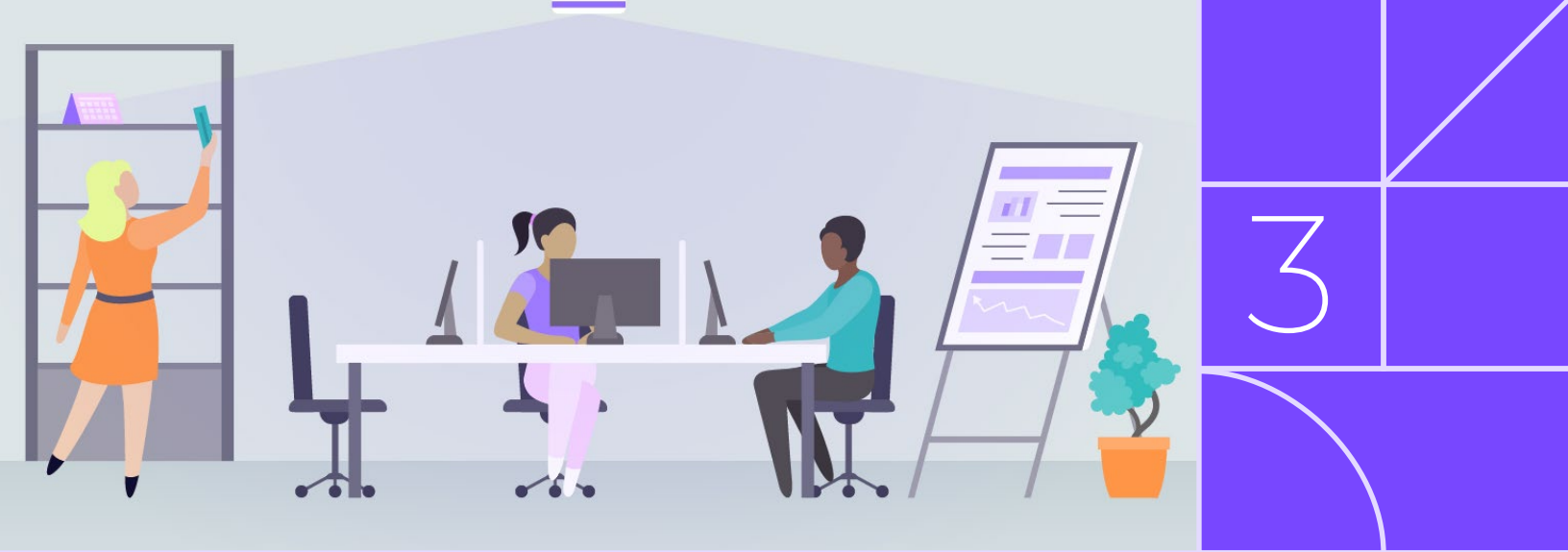
> If you don't offer employees tools to ease the transition, you'll lose buy-in from your workforce.

Occupancy sensors such as VergeSense come with **built-in integrations** for desk and room reservation software. That way, the real-time data can sync with reservation systems to give employees a user-facing way to claim the spaces they need for each different work day, with no **mix-ups or double bookings**.

With these benefits in hand, are you interested in learning more about what to look for in a specific desk management solution?

Read on to get our guide on what you should keep in mind as you consider different solutions.
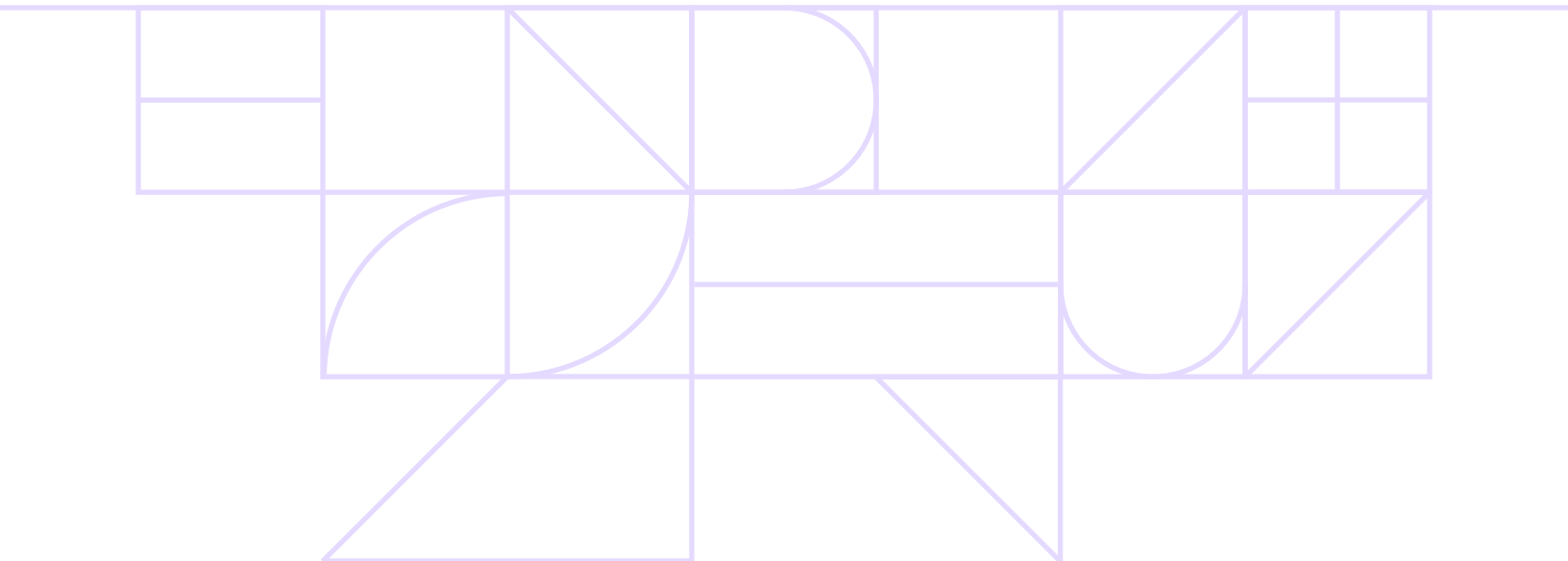
What To Look For in Your Next Desk Management Solution

If you're committed to developing an unassigned seating plan, aided by insights from occupancy sensors, the thought now has to be:

"What desk management solution is right for you?"

To make this process easier, in this chapter we've laid out **3 things you should look for in a desk management solution**. For each, we'll:

- **Break down the challenge** executive teams are facing.
- **Present an ideal solution** to consider based on your priorities.

Robust Integration With the Rest of Your Workplace Tech Stack

The Tech Challenge: An ever-growing list of tools that don't talk to each other.

From Microsoft Outlook, Google Calendar, and Slack to any number of internally-developed company software, **companies under 50 employees often have 40 apps they work with** — **and those with 1000+ employees can have over 200**. These are all tools you'll need to potentially integrate with your desk management solution so you can monitor data on workplace usage and employees can easily see desk and conference availability.

Your Ideal Solution: An open API with native integrations.

The solution you work with needs to not only indicate a willingness to let you customize those connections through an open API, **they should be actively supporting you by developing integrations of their own.**

VergeSense was built to be open. That's why we have **integration partnerships** with some of the leading workplace technology providers today and are constantly working on building new ones based on feedback from our clients.

VergeSense Integrations, powering live desk booking solutions, include:

- Serraview
- iOffice
- OfficeSpace
- SpaceIQ
- Comfy
- Teem
- Cloudbooking
- Robin
- Modo Labs
- RICOH Smart Spaces
- Schneider Electric EcoStruxure Workplace Advisor

Request a Consultation

Unlock more value by seeing how VergeSense can work with your existing systems. Schedule a consultation with our team to discuss your specific needs.

Request Consultation

People-Counting Across a Variety of Space Types

The Tech Challenge: Common occupancy sensors can't accurately track desk usage.

If one of your top priorities is tracking activity across both open workspaces and conference rooms — to gather workplace optimization data and confirm compliance with company and state COVID-19 policies — **many sensors simply can't accommodate that.**

Common footfall sensors, for example, rely on Passive Infrared (PIR) to count movement at entries and exits. But, desk-level sensing is a level of granularity they were never designed for. The same can be said for badging systems. Useful for monitoring overall entries and exits, but not ideal if you're looking for desk-level accuracy.
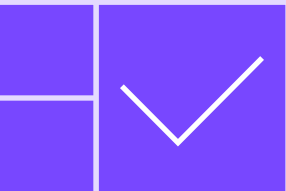
Your Ideal Solution: AI-powered vision-based occupancy sensors.

Vision-based sensors translate optical data into data points to create an accurate real-time map of desk usage and occupancy in any workspace. There's never a gap in coverage and it can accommodate whatever space you put it in.

VergeSense's **ceiling mounted sensors** go beyond the doorway. Each sensor creates a field of vision covering several hundred square feet and provides a more accurate count across open office seating, in conference rooms, and more.

Our patented computer vision model is uniquely capable of processing ultra-low resolution imagery, ensuring the highest degree of accuracy while remaining 100% anonymous.

Truly Accurate Real-Time Occupancy

The Tech Challenge: Unreliable real-time sensors lead to an unhappy workforce.

If the tools are unreliable, break down, or actually decrease productivity, you'll get calls to switch back to your prior setup. The closest common sensor that can report desk usage and offer reservations are under-the desk sensors.
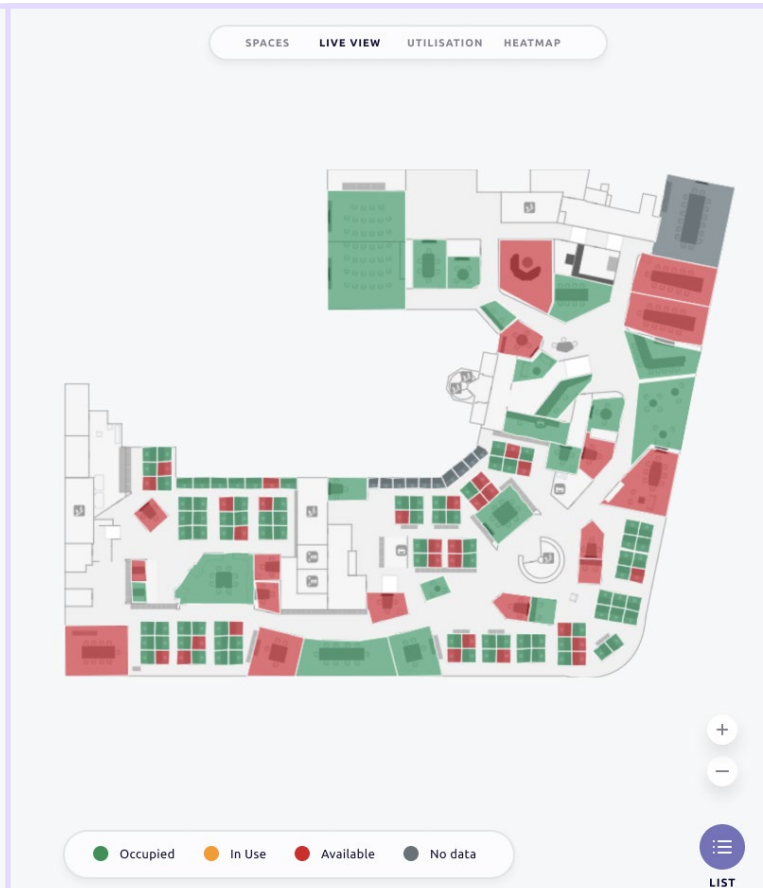
However, because they typically rely on motion detection, they're not good at accurately detecting people if movement is stagnant for a long period of time (such as, say, someone working at a desk). And, there's nothing worse than booking a desk you think is available only to find it's occupied.
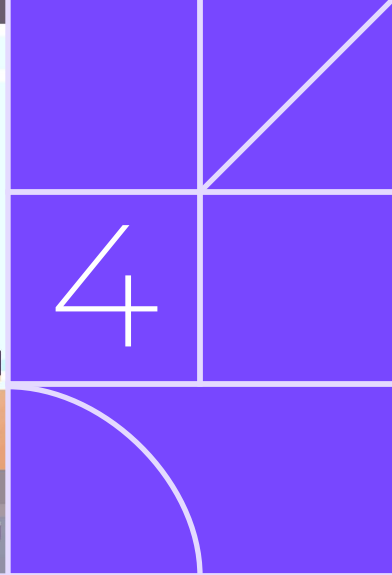
Your Ideal Solution: A tamper-proof sensor with guaranteed real-time views of desk usage.

The solution here is to once again rely on vision-based occupancy sensors. If you can guarantee accurate reporting of desk usage, you can connect it to a desk reservation system that's consistently up-to-date.

VergeSense sensors are optimized to provide the industry's most accurate readings of true occupancy.

Additionally, because our occupancy sensors are deployed on the ceiling, **they're less likely to be damaged** when compared to the alternative under-the-desk sensors.

SPACES   **LIVE VIEW**   UTILISATION   HEATMAP

● Occupied   ● In Use   ● Available   ● No data

LIST

Where to Go From Here

With the benefits of agile workspaces clear, **now is the time for you to consider a dynamic workplace solution**. When you do, it's important to evaluate every use case. This not only includes the data you'll need to continually optimize your workplace strategy and design, but also the information your employees will need to do their best work.. Through high variability and future uncertainties around workplace design, unlock visibility into real-time data to make smart decisions, with VergeSense.

VergeSense occupancy sensors can play an integral role in your plans.

See Our Products

Learn more about our hardware, dashboards, and integrations that offer unprecedented visibility into how your spaces work for your people.

Get VergeSense Solutions

Reach Out

Take the next step. Request a demo and we'll walk you through how our sensors can fit your specific space and agile workspace plans.

Request a Demo