

Workrite Ergonomics Celebrates 25th Anniversary



Workrite

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THE INGREDIENTS THAT GO INTO BAKING UP A BUSINESS ARE KEY TO ITS LONG-TERM SUCCESS. First, there needs to be a tasty product. Timing is critical to get the company to rise. There needs to be a hunger for what is created. And the business needs to be in the right location to capitalize on the market.

Most companies can do quite well with a few of those ingredients in place. The rare business is lucky enough to have all of them. Workrite Ergonomics is one of them. The company is celebrat-

ing its 25th anniversary this year because it has benefitted from (and in some cases, created through hard work) this recipe for success.

The little California company has grown. Its market, which was once limited to the West Coast, now covers the entire country.

It is a remarkable story of being in the right place at the right time with the right products. That will sustain a business for awhile. But Workrite's story is also about adapting to changes in the market and being close to its

customers. Though the company was founded a quarter of a century ago, it is enjoying some of its most successful years now. That success comes from a dash of good luck and a lot of market savvy.

Workrite Ergonomics has always worked in ergonomics. That is the constant that has guided the company since its founding in a Novato, Calif., garage in 1991. Workrite was started by entrepreneurs Ray Hendricksen, Tom James and Brenda Hartley. The company initially operated out of Hendricksen's garage.

The idea of ergonomics has changed over the years. First it was concerned with the health of factory and warehouse workers. Lift improv-



Artopex Quebec Showrooms Shine at the Grands Prix du Design Gala

The Quebec City showroom was awarded in the "Showroom" category. The jury remarked that "the showroom reflects the company's values well and is an asset to the neighborhood. It expertly translates the excellent ideas developed in the Montreal showroom to the Quebec City space." →44



Workrite

erly and it could cause injuries and health issues. Ergonomics in the office came later when workers began sitting for hours in front of computer screens and pecking away all day on keyboards.

It was at this time and place Workrite Ergonomics was founded. Computers were invading the office, but no one knew that devices like the keyboard and computer mouse would affect the health of the workers who used them. Workrite Ergonomics started with a few simple products:

the wrist rest — a tube that would sit in front of the worker's keyboard to support the wrist; and an anti-glare screen for CRTs. In 1993, an order for 500 WristResters was sold to a national insurance company based in Bloomington, Ill. One of Workrite's first customers was an up-and-coming tech company named Cisco in San Jose, Calif.

Place always has been an important ingredient to Workrite's success. When the company grew too large for the garage, it moved into a

series of larger facilities, all in the Marin or Sonoma county region around San Francisco. The company has called Petaluma, Calif., home for more than 10 years.

Its adjacency to Silicon Valley has served it well. California is arguably the most health conscious state in the U.S. It is also home to an inordinate number of computer firms, many of them in Workrite's backyard. As the technology industry grew in Silicon Valley, the companies there began a fierce competition for talent

that continues today. The tech companies have done everything to attract and retain the best talent, adding things like pubs, candy stores and bowling alleys to their offices to keep workers happy. They also began adding ergonomic products as perks. Since techies tend to be cutting edge, they were not afraid to try something like a sit-stand workstation, which is a core product for Workrite.

Some companies are new to sit-stand, but Workrite had the first BIFMA-rated, sit-stand product in North America in 2007. Workrite has had sit-stand products for

a long, long time, and its expertise in the category shows. As the sit-stand trend grew in places like Denmark and Sweden, Workrite began making sit-stand products for the U.S. market, and tech companies were buying. In 1998, the company launched its first sit-stand desk, long before many in the industry saw a market for the suddenly popular products. Workrite has come a long way since then as exemplified by the introduction of its Fundamentals line of height-adjustable desks and LED lamps at NeoCon last year.

This experience has been important for Workrite. After

building sit-stand products for nearly 20 years, it has the kinks worked out. It made mistakes (and fixed them) on height-adjustable desks in the 1990s, earlier than most companies in the industry even began thinking about the category. Since then, Workrite has refined its products. It also has benefitted from the growing, healthy workplace trend. The adoption of sit-stand products has skyrocketed in the last five years.

The little California company has grown. Its market, which was once limited to the West Coast, now covers the entire country. And sales are

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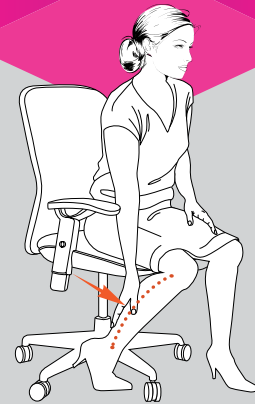
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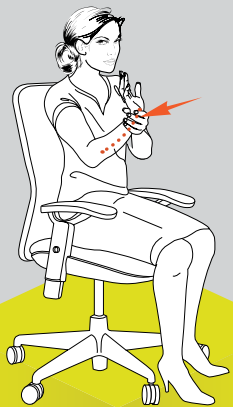
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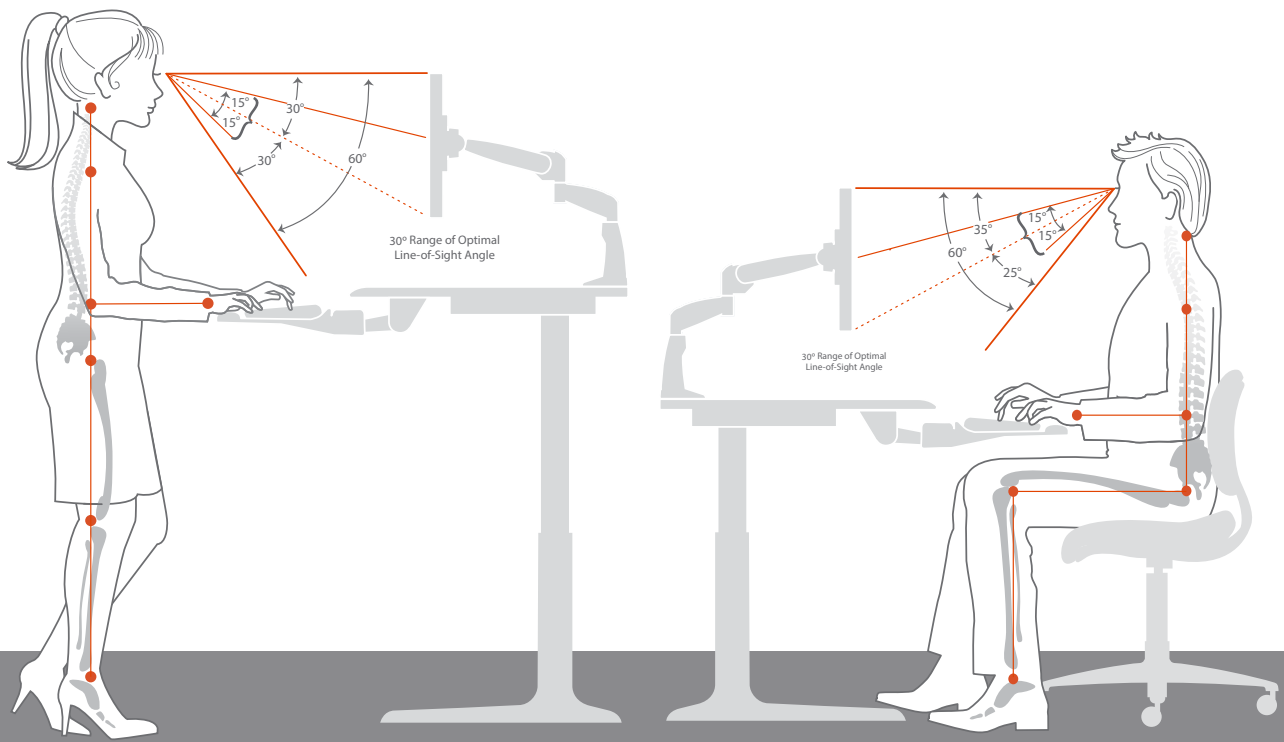
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back
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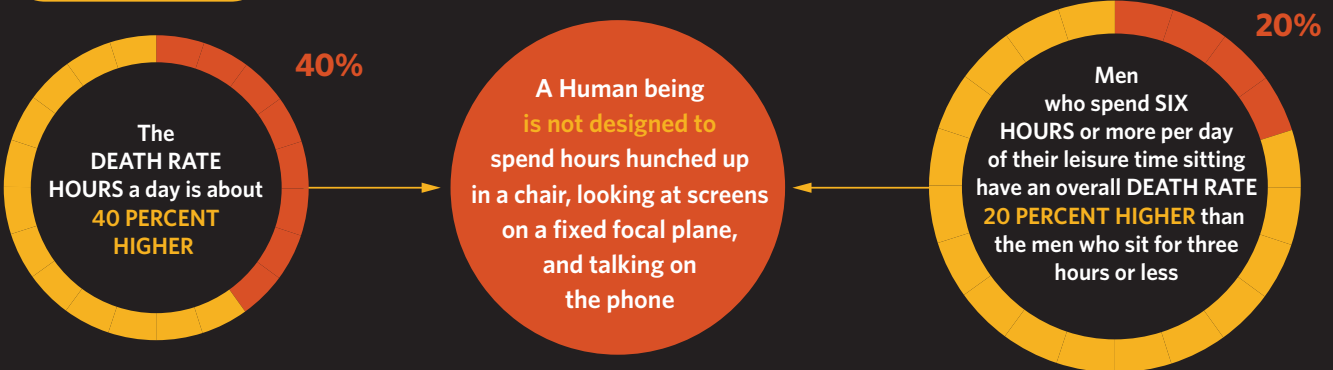
Workrite Ergonomic Graphic



How Prolonged Sitting Can Affect Your Health*

- Calorie Burning** slows to 1 calorie per minute. Insulin effect drops **24%** and risk of diabetes rises.
- When we sit, the **electrical activity** in the legs and gluteal muscles (buttocks) slows way down
- Enzymes** in the blood that burn fat drop **90%**
- After 2 hours of sitting, good cholesterol levels can drop **20%**

*Validity of Self-Reported Measures of Workplace Sitting Time and Breaks in Sitting Time
Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise: October 2011 - Volume 43 - Issue 10 - pp 1907-1912



Research from Alpa Patel, an epidemiologist at the American Cancer Society, who tracked the health of 123,000 Americans between 1992 and 2006



Workrite's new Natural OLED Desk Light



poised to top the \$100 million mark very soon, said President Charles Lawrence. Four years ago, the company was half that size. Still, Workrite believes it is in the sweet spot – not some huge company that tries to be all things to everyone and not one of the growing tide of Asian office furniture makers flooding the market with inexpensive (and in many cases, cheaply built) height-

adjustable workstations. Its parent company is Knappe & Vogt, the Grand Rapids-based component maker known for its drawer slides. KV is privately held by Chicago-based Wind Point Partners.

Workrite continues to adapt to the market, adding a new software tool, Workrite.care, that helps workers stay healthy in the office. It is also closely following trends in the

wearable health device market. “We are focused on ergonomics and wellness, and we are not trying to be all things to all people,” Lawrence said. “We think we sell more than just a product, and that is one of the key differentiators for our company. As long as we stay true to that, I think we can continue to grow.”

From its foundation, Workrite also has focused on

customer service. To this day, Lawrence said Workrite is very much a sales- and customer-service oriented company.

It is intimately connected to customers that use its products with its own sales organization. Workrite has 30 salespeople across the country that “wake up and think about Workrite customers,” he said.

As the healthy workplace trend took hold, Workrite found itself fighting for projects against a growing number of competitors. Lawrence said that’s where the company’s experience shined through. “A lot of workstations sold today go up and down, but they still don’t provide some of the ergonomic benefits (that Workrite products do),” Lawrence said. “They don’t go low enough or high enough. They just move. Some of the systems

furniture guys still don’t fully understand why they are selling them.”

“We have a great foundation to explore and invest in new and different things, but we are going to stay true to who we are,”

As the market for height-adjustable workstations rises, it helps everyone, just like a rising tide lifts all boats. But the companies selling these products still need a message that resonates with customers. They have to add value. “Just selling a (height-adjustable) product works when the economy is growing, but when things slow down, customers start looking for the people that are experts,” Lawrence

said. “We’ve seen people who have bought (height-adjustable products) from competitors who have come back to us and say they wish they would have found us earlier.”

What will the next 25 years bring for Workrite? It’s hard to tell, but expect the company to stay true to its roots. It has doubled in size over the past four years, and Lawrence said Workrite could double again in the next four to five years. Having an East Coast footprint is bound to help. And new product development is in full swing. It appears as if the wellness and ergonomic trend is going to keep gaining strength.

“We have a great foundation to explore and invest in new and different things, but we are going to stay true to who we are,” Lawrence said.



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