



COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

New technology raising floor for creating building efficiencies



WIRED SPACE

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When most of us are asked to consider the role or responsibility of a flooring contractor, the common belief is that a flooring contractor helps building owners choose the most efficient and effective flooring type for their needs, then purchase and install that material. It's not always as simple as selecting tile, laminate or carpet. Some flooring contractors are becoming much more involved in the overall building's design.

Flooring contractors have always played an important role in the overall finish-out of a commercial real estate project, and their role is expanding as we move into the 21st century. With the recent technology advancements in the workplace, along with growing tenant requirements, the flooring contractor is one of the first sources to which brokers, developers, architects, and end users turn.

The first step in the flooring process is demolition, whether needed for new construction or renovation. The flooring contractor begins by delivering demolition budgets, which can include not only the removal of an existing floor covering,

but also the removal of materials containing asbestos (Vinyl Asbestos Tile "VAT" or adhesives). The removal of materials containing asbestos, known as an asbestos abatement, can be somewhat costly; however, some flooring contractors with an expertise in asbestos removal can perform the job at a significant cost savings to the client.

Once demolition is complete, the flooring contractor must evaluate the condition of the sub-floor, and then prepare it properly before installing the new product. In some cases, where impervious (solid) or resilient (flexible) floor covering is to be installed, the moisture content in the slab must first be measured. If moisture is in excess, the flooring contractor must first get the moisture under control before installing the new product. The moisture content can be controlled by allowing the slab to "air out" in a climate-controlled environment, which can take weeks or even months. In extreme cases the flooring contractor may have to either cap or seal the floor, which can be very costly — sometimes as much as the floor covering material itself.

Access flooring

Once demolition and sub-floor preparation are complete, the appropriate flooring material for the facility must be selected, taking into consideration how the space will be utilized. The modern-day trend, which

exhibits great advancements in the flooring industry, is to install a raised floor. A raised floor secures a two-foot-by-two-foot panel to four adjustable pedestals, creating an access floor. This access floor can be raised as little as two-and-a-half inches to as high as the client desires.

The panels are laser leveled to eliminate all imperfections in the slab. The panels can also conceal problem areas mentioned earlier (asbestos and excessive moisture in the concrete), which are often associated with significant repair costs. Access flooring is predominately used for its flexibility and long-term facility efficiency.

In new construction, the slab is typically recessed so the end user doesn't even notice the use of raised flooring at all.

Another benefit of raised flooring is in the electrical phase. All electrical and telecommunication cabling is run under the floor and brought up where the client needs it, eliminating the need for power poles. Utilizing this technology allows the power to be removed from the furniture as well, providing substantial cost savings to the client.

In fact, the electrical system under the floor is completely modular, allowing electrical components to be unplugged while hot, moved anywhere in the space, and plugged back in. The building maintenance personnel can do all of the reconfiguring themselves without the need for an

electrician every time reconfiguring is required.

Cool solutions

In addition to power and telecommunication, the delivery of air conditioning and heating can be added under the access floor. The access floor becomes a pressurized plenum, delivering cleaner air than what typically gets circulated in the traditional overhead ducts. The return air ducts are still required to carry the air out of the vicinity but because the conditioned air does not have to pass through the still air above six feet, it is delivered to the room almost 10 degrees warmer (60 to 65 degrees), allowing the system to be more

economical than the traditional air conditioning system.

The facility's employees tend to be more satisfied with this type of system because the air is delivered to exact areas of comfort, eliminating the hot and cold areas in a building. All of this can be done on a floor raised a mere nine inches.

The most common floor covering installed on top of raised flooring is carpet tile, although many other types of floor covering are used as well. The carpet tiles are available in various sizes, and in an almost infinite pattern or color selection. The tiles are usually installed with releasable adhesive; however newer technology allows for the carpet tile to be installed

without the use of adhesives, instead utilizing buttons which match the carpet tile to the access panel.

Although technology is ever changing in the flooring industry, clients trust flooring contractors for providing the most up-to-date solutions. Because of the recent improvements in technology, flooring often becomes the foundation for determining how the rest of the building will be designed, resulting in more efficient and economically fit facilities and greater tenant satisfaction.

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