

Bigger offices aren't always the right fit

By Adina Genn

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Your business is lean and mean, right down to the low-overhead office space. You pass these savings on to clients – after all, it's your talent they're paying for, not some class-A office rental.

But even the most ardent believers of no-frills offices may be hesitant to host a client meeting.

Just ask Susan Gatti, president of Que Productions, a film production company in historic Babylon Village. Gatti chose an admittedly small office, whose square footage she won't reveal. The space is large enough to comfortably house Gatti, three associates and a recent visitor. Adjacent to Argyle Lake, the office is located in a one-story red brick building, just steps from the historic 1801 house, one of the village's oldest homes (now a professional building).

"I don't keep a studio," said Gatti, who shoots 90 percent of her projects on location. A studio, she said, would be occupied only "5 percent of the time, and empty and dark for most of the day. Clients would pay for that overhead."

Instead, her office space illustrates her company's core value: strong impact on a low budget.

Gatti's fine-arts background is evident on the office walls, which adorn some of her oil paintings. Also visible are the company's collection of Telly statuettes, awards given to top industry talent (in the last five years, Que has won eight awards, one for its work for Cablevision). Visitors can also view a sample of Que's work, including a DVD for Beechwood Organization's Meadowbrook Pointe Athletic Club and Spa.

Scattered about are quirky novelties, such as a small replica of King Kong on a movie set. And up until recently, Gatti's partner, Nick Karis, displayed a collection of vintage cameras; he's removed them, however, to add workstations.

Office furniture manufacturers have expanded their lines in the last five years to accommodate small businesses concerned about budget and space, said Ilya Bechtold, director of technical support for Waldners Business Environments, which has a showroom in Farmingdale. "It's a growing need for smaller businesses," she said.

Among the offerings are product lines that feature variations at many price points. This way, a company can upgrade common spaces, including reception areas and conference rooms, with higher-end pieces that feature wood or glass, for example. But for workstations, companies can select items with less costly finishes and still enjoy an aesthetically pleasing interior and stay within their budget, Bechtold said.

Designers can also help owners customize their space, she said.

At Que, Gatti and her co-workers like to capture a cross breeze by keeping the office door and window open. Yes, the occasional duck wanders in, but as far as Gatti and her associates are concerned, that's part of the area's charm.

Clients who visit find the charm contagious, Gatti said.

"It's a quaint village," she said. "[Clients] walk around. They like the little shops and the cafes."

For Gatti, the area sparks creativity. "I love the lake," she said, adding she often thinks up campaigns and sketches lakeside.

For client meetings where more space is needed, she reserves the conference room in the nearby 1801 house. Nine times out of 10, however, Gatti winds up going to the client's site for meetings.

To produce award-winning work and stick to her cost-effective mantra, Gatti contracts with a steady group of freelancers who also work for big agencies, she said. And if she needs studio space or additional equipment, she can rent it. But most of the time, there's no need, she said.

Some prospects seem disappointed that there's "no big soundboard that takes up half the room," she said. Some say, "We were looking for a bigger company," she added.

But experience has proven that she may see them again. "We've had people come back," Gatti said.