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Benching

These are the 10 most commonly asked questions about benching for commercial office environments, with straightforward answers to help you make a confident, well-informed purchase decision.

Top 10 Questions — Benching

1   **How much space does each person need at a benching workstation?**

The practical sweet spot for benching is 80–100 square feet per person. Ultra-dense configurations can reach 50–65 sq ft per station, which is architecturally achievable but consistently produces lower satisfaction scores and acoustic complaints. Standard open-plan benching typically allocates 100–125 sq ft per person, while a generous open-plan layout runs 125–150 sq ft. Always plan for at least 80 sq ft if employee comfort and productivity are priorities.

2   **What surface width do I need for benching workstations?**

Surface width depends on the user's role. Laptop-only or hoteling users can function at 42–48 inches wide, while standard knowledge workers need 48–54 inches. Dual-monitor setups require a minimum 60-inch-wide surface, and technical or analyst roles often need 66–72 inches. Surface depth should be 24 inches for laptop-only users, but 27–30 inches is the ergonomic standard for any workstation with a monitor — pairing 24-inch depth with a monitor arm is a common workaround on shallow benching runs.

3   **How do I handle noise and privacy in a benching environment?**

Acoustic management in open benching requires three simultaneous strategies: Absorb, Block, and Cover. Absorb using acoustic ceiling tile with an NRC rating of 0.70 or higher and carpet rather than hard flooring. Block using fabric-wrapped privacy screens 24–30 inches above the surface at every station — acrylic screens provide no acoustic benefit. Cover using a ceiling-plenum sound masking system to raise the ambient noise floor and reduce speech intelligibility across the space. Plan one enclosed focus room for every 8–10 benching stations as acoustic refuge.

4

What power and data should I specify for each benching station?

The standard specification for most knowledge workers is 4 power outlets plus 2 data ports plus 1 USB-A/C combo per station. The minimum of 2 outlets and 2 data ports is routinely inadequate — users typically have 4–6 plugged devices including monitors, laptops, phone chargers, and desktop accessories. For intensive roles such as trading desks or dual-monitor builds, specify 6 outlets, 4 data ports, and 2 USB per station. Inventory actual device counts before finalizing power specifications to avoid fire code violations and power strip clutter.

5

What accessories are essential to specify alongside benching?

Because benching provides no overhead storage, no built-in monitor arms, and no acoustic enclosure, all these functions must be supplied separately. Privacy screens (24-inch fabric-wrapped as standard) provide both visual separation and acoustic absorption. Monitor arms reclaim 6–10 inches of depth — critical on shallow surfaces. Mobile pedestals in BBF (box/box/file) configuration provide the personal storage that benching eliminates. Task lighting compensates for ambient lighting gaps, and keyboard trays reclaim 8–12 inches on shallow stations. Budget for accessories at specification time — they are not optional add-ons.

6

What types of benching systems are available and which is most common?

The four main types are back-to-back (spine), single-sided (perimeter), 120-degree cluster, and panel-integrated. Back-to-back benching is the most common and space-efficient configuration — two rows of users face away from each other sharing a central spine beam that carries both structure and power/data distribution. Typical back-to-back run depths are 48–60 inches total (24–30 inches per user). Single-sided configurations work for perimeter placement along walls. 120-degree cluster arrangements suit collaborative team pods. Panel-integrated systems are often used for transitioning from cubicles to open plan while maintaining some visual separation.

7

Is benching right for my team's type of work?

Benching is well-suited for highly collaborative roles, product teams, creative teams, marketing, and employees who work in the office 1–3 days per week as hoteling users. It is less suitable for deep-focus individual work such as software development, financial analysis, legal, or research roles that require sustained concentration. Confidential information roles subject to HIPAA, attorney-client privilege, or similar regulations are a poor fit for open benching without private enclosures. C-suite and VP-level leadership typically expects enclosed workspace. Before committing to benching, honestly assess the ratio of collaborative to deep-focus work your team performs.

8   What aisle widths do I need between benching runs?

Primary circulation aisles should be a minimum 44 inches wide (ADA requirement) with 60–72 inches recommended for comfortable two-way foot traffic. Secondary aisles between back-to-back runs need 36 inches minimum for egress, with 48–54 inches recommended for daily comfort. For runs longer than 10–12 stations, insert a 36–48 inch cross-aisle break to allow circulation and egress compliance. Back-to-back shared zones — the space behind seated users on both sides — need 60 inches minimum. Document all aisle widths in the floor plan before furniture is ordered.

9   What is the maximum length for a benching run?

The practical maximum for an uninterrupted benching run is 12–14 stations. Beyond this length, inserting a 36–48 inch cross-aisle break every 10–12 stations is required for egress safety and daily circulation. The minimum practical run is 2 stations, but 4-station runs are more economical on a per-station basis due to shared structural and power infrastructure costs. Long runs also require cross-member bracing at intervals to prevent racking and flex in the spine beam — confirm bracing specifications with the manufacturer for any run over 8 stations.

10   What makes benching different from traditional cubicles or panel systems?

Benching systems share a central structural spine, beam, or floor-mounted frame across multiple stations, while cubicles use tall partition walls (typically 42–85+ inches) as their structural skeleton from which surfaces hang. Benching panels — if present at all — are low (12–24 inches above the work surface) and purely functional for visual separation. The key differences are density (benching achieves 50–130 sq ft per person vs. 150–200 sq ft for cubicles), sightline openness, and flexibility. Benching runs can add or remove stations without panel reconfiguration, while panel-based systems require significant disassembly to expand or contract.

Have more questions? Our office furniture specialists are ready to help.

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