

There Is A Sound Solution Available

By Sean Dickson



What is the sound of quiet? In today's digitally automated, technologically advanced age, it's very rarely heard, especially in the workplace.

We are besieged with blips, beeps, boisterous co-workers, clients, customers, computer conferences, and telephone calls. Dealing with our own ever-increasing job demands and stressors is enough alone, without the added interference of the other business being conducted throughout the office.

Can a comfortable acoustical environment – the sound of quiet – really be achieved? Yes, it can - with sound masking!

In describing sound masking, it is important to understand a few simple principles of sound and the ABCs of controlling it.

Sound travels directly and indirectly through reflection, transmission, and diffraction. Various building materials are available to (A) absorb sound, while barriers and furniture (B) block it. However, a significant proportion of the sound diffracts over and around partitions, or travels through

vents or openings in walls and ceilings. Consequently, there is the need for (C) cover. The cover is sound masking. It is attained through an electronically engineered sound masking system that meets precise performance criteria. Sound masking works because it changes the dynamic range of sound in an environment.

Typically, the dynamic range in most locations is large, meaning that there is a great degree of difference between the lowest, or ambient, sound level and the highest levels of sound, when people are actively speaking and working. As a result, offices are perceived as noisy.

In such instances, the higher decibel (dB) sound of things, like normal speech, is easily heard in a backdrop of a lower, ambient background sound (dB level).

Sound masking works by subtly raising the ambient background sound level, thereby reducing sound's dynamic range. This effectively "masks" unwanted noise, makes speech unintelligible (creating privacy), and

the corresponding benefits unfold.

By providing speech privacy and confidentiality, and minimizing distractions, the doorway to increased productivity is unlocked. Quiet and calm replace auditory stressors, and individuals are able to embrace the empowering echoes of their own creative and analytical thoughts. Job satisfaction ensues. Even music and paging (new or existing) can be run throughout the systems as an added plus.

Considering that sound masking system costs are generally in the range of \$1 to \$1.50 per square foot, it reveals itself as a very cost-effective alternative. It provides a terrific return on investment as well, as a system will usually pay itself off in the first year, due to the aforementioned reasons.

Discovering the sound of quiet is truly a challenge in an era of open-concept offices, compressed cubicles, and shrinking personal workspaces. The answer is achievable, even quite available, if we simply listen rather than look, for it's a very sound solution. X

Sean Dickson is a Utility employee with dB Sound Solutions (www.dbsoundsolutions.ca), which opened for business January 2007. The company is the sole supplier of the Spectra Sound Masking System in southwestern Ontario.

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