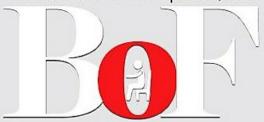
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Groupe Lacasse Shifts to Address Changing Office

by Rob Kirkbride

No one would have wished for a worldwide pandemic. But no company in the office furniture industry might be better positioned to respond to the needs of both the work-from-home and the traditional office than Groupe Lacasse.

The Quebec-based manufacturer has done a masterful job of shifting gears to address the crisis, first by coming out with a package of furniture for the home office and by creating products that make office work safer as well.

Soon after the pandemic hit, the Groupe Lacasse team gathered (virtually) to come up with solutions for workers suddenly pushed into inadequate home offices and next for companies that want to reopen but don't know how to keep their workers safe. The company's response also benefited from its use of the latest edgebanding technology which creates an attractive table edge that is easily cleanable and keeps out germs.



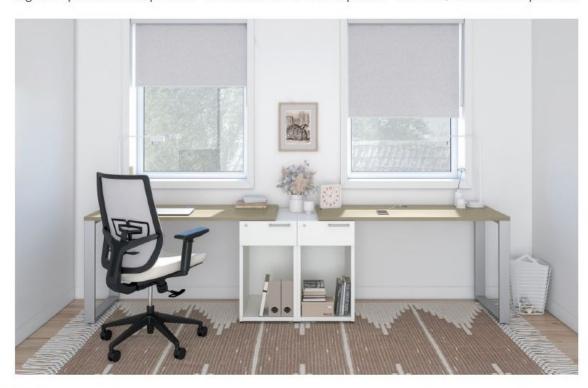


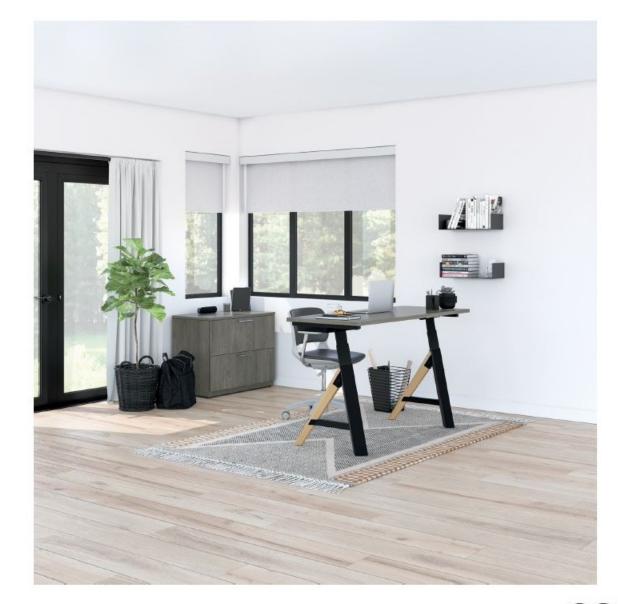
Since Groupe Lacasse has so much manufacturing experience making custom products, it was easy to transition some production to a home office offering.

"The first reaction across the uncertain working environment, Groupe Lacasse still serve home with people we knew and what like all our customers." we were observing with other was the necessity in many cases themselves to the category. Since ucts. to let our people work from their Groupe Lacasse has so much chairman and chief executive offi- ing custom products, it was easy

board with our employees and indeed an uncertain future - just office customers for its dealer network, so it made sure to in-Home office became a fast fo- clude its partners in the design, people being forced to stay home, cus as its products already lent marketing and sales of the prod-

Groupe Lacasse's home ofhomes," said Sylvain Garneau, manufacturing experience mak- fice planning started before COVID-19, said Dominic Aubry, cer. "Very quickly it became a criti- to transition some production to product manager for laminate cal agenda item, that this shut- a home office offering — slightly casegoods. "We spend a great down is going to last much longer smaller in scale, but still the same deal of our time imagining the futhan anticipated and that it is go- commercial quality the company ture and how it impacts our daily ing to require us to adapt to an is known for. It was important business, which underpins our







Prior to the pandemic, many companies were reluctant to try work from home because they might have less control or the work might not be as efficient.

long-term product development plan, and working from home was already part of that plan," he said. "So we were already contemplating what that would look like. What changed was the impact of COVID-19 and the speed at which people were required to work from home. Obviously, many companies shutdown completely, and many businesses who remained open had no choice but to send their employees home to work virtually."

What started as a temporary setting became more long term as the crisis went on. For most new work-from-home employees, it might have started with a dining table or a small spot in the living room. As the weeks working from home have turned to months, home office workers started to look for a more permanent solution. Some companies have decided not to bring workers back to the traditional office at all. Others are opting to split workers into different shifts or have them work from home a few days a week.

"We believe that when everyone gets the greenlight to return to work, there may not be room for them because physical distancing rules will apply," Aubry said. "In order to make room, many companies will keep their employees virtual asking them to work from a remote setting. Not only that, we believe some businesses may even realize financial or productivity gains to having employees working remotely, making this more than a short-term trend."

Prior to the pandemic, many companies were reluctant to try work from home because they might have less control or the work might not be as efficient. Since they were forced to try it, some of them are seeing the advantages and could keep the concept. That's why Groupe Lacasse believes working





The industry hasn't done a great job serving the home office market.

remotely and working from home niture, especially at home. The in the months and years ahead.

introduce commercial products company observed was the size sonably priced. differences and space configurations.

a 36-by-72-inch desk with a cre- assemble furniture makers. denza, a hutch and a lateral file, maybe even a bookcase, obvi- to introduce products that are ously it won't easily fit in most not ready-to-assemble, but priresidential spaces. So we started to think about scalable furniture, and with a level of service online with different configurations in support of residential space restrictions in order to be more efficient on a square footage basis offering our dealer partners the and take more advantage of wall ability to sell home office furnispace, certain not to block win- ture to their clients. We do not dows, closets and doorways."

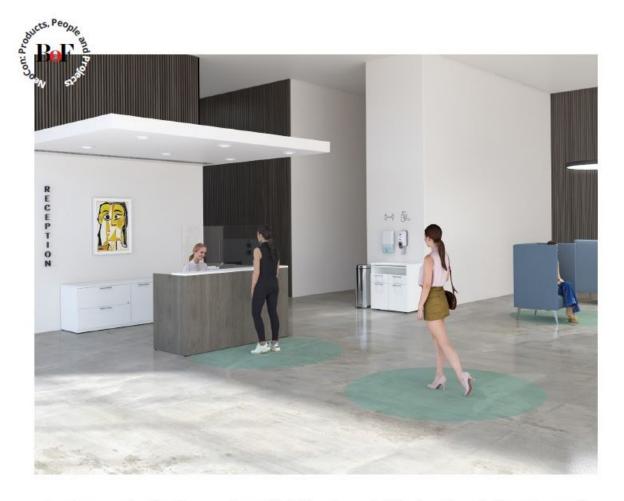
feel of the furniture has to be dif- traditional commercial dealer ferent. Nobody wants ugly fur- market. That's who we're always

will continue to be a strong trend aesthetic was slightly more important in residential furniture, Groupe Lacasse started by look- Groupe Lacasse found, because ing at the different characteristics furniture participates in the décor and particularities of the market. of the house. And obviously some A sure way to fail would be to market conditions like price and delivery time were very important and simply throw them into the because in many cases, the end home and believe it would be a user is going to pay for the furniperfect fit. There are differences ture. So Groupe Lacasse came up in the markets. The first thing the with a solution that is really rea-

The industry hasn't done a great job serving the home office mar-"There is a significant differ- ket, said Kevin Glynn, executive ence between the residential and vice president of sales. He said the commercial markets," Aubry the industry has left it to the likes said. "If you have ever tried to fit of Wayfair and IKEA and ready-to-

"What we did to address it was marily come already assembled, big box stores simply can't provide," he said, "And we're not selling direct (to consumers); we're sell online; we truly support our Also the general aesthetic and bricks and mortar dealers, the





Lacasse products and services. suit the home office," Glynn said. es and getting as many people We have taken a BIFMA-certified "That's been our goal, and we've product and scaled it to fit a just released it to the market. It of square footage was the rule. smaller, dedicated home office will be available through Groupe Now, the opposite is true. Space environment wonderfully well. Lacasse authorized dealers." You can't have the same scale of product — it would overwhelm a — a collection of home office relatively small space that you're furniture that was commercially physical separation in benching dedicating your home-based of- tough and could be used eight or desking solutions. fice furniture to."

of quality, he said. It's going to be Groupe Lacasse's case is a limited themselves. lifetime warranty.

quality product, with great design, For the last decade, open space, customers could buy that would

going to support with Groupe at an affordable price, scaled to benching, desking, long surfac-

hours a day, stylish enough to But it's not scaled back in terms work in a home and at a price point that won't break the bank the same quality with the same for a home worker who might commercial warranties, which in have to purchase the products did not want to create products

"You're getting a tremendous how the office itself might change.

as possible in the least amount is needed, as are personal protec-Groupe Lacasse found its niche tion accessories at workstations, along with panels and screens for

Regardless of when or how offices reopen, they will be different than they were in the past, Garneau said. But the company simply to chase the post-COVID The next step was to imagine trends. It wanted to create products that its dealers could sell and







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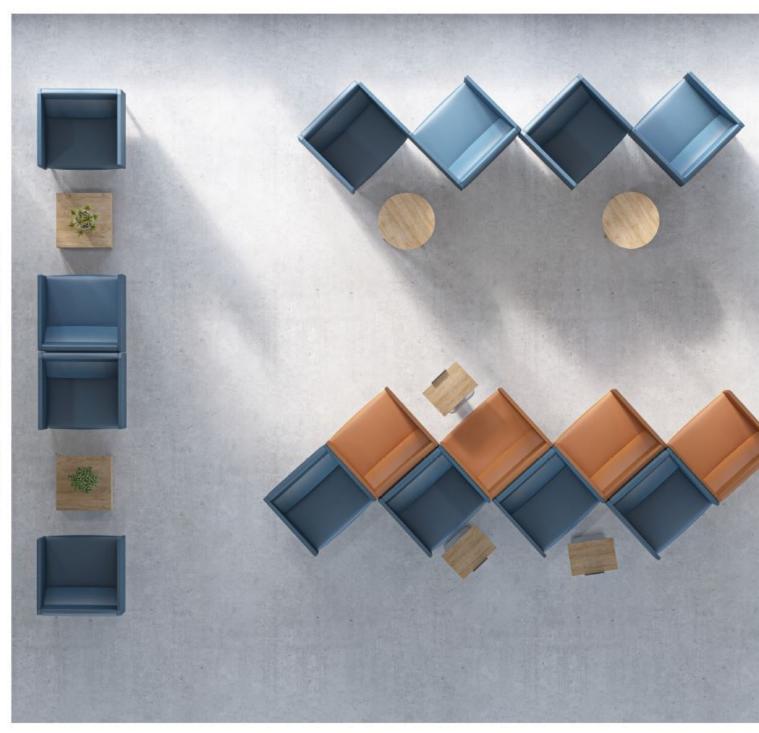
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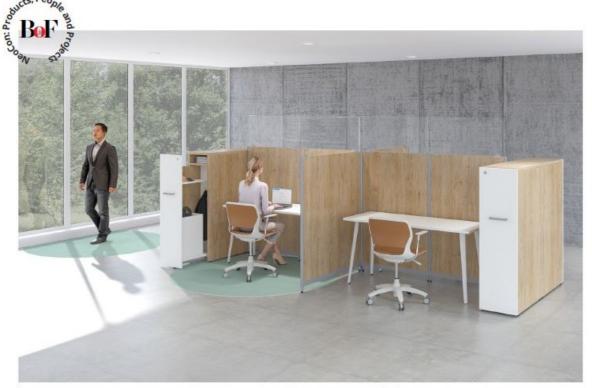
ly. The only thing I know is that employers industry. The company got to work. are looking at what they can do to safely bring their people back. They're looking oped solutions for casegoods, systems and at solutions. And what we want to do is to seating they can bundle together that can provide a functional yet unobtrusive product solution that meets the needs of a post its dealer network, either for retrofitting COVID-19 workspace, that provides for the the current setups employers have with well-being and safety of the employees screens and panels that can divide and well into the future should another wave of make separations or for new setups. the virus ever materialize. It's intended to are. This is what we had in mind."

help employees work regardless of the sit- portant as people return to the office. Garneau said Groupe Lacasse was inspired by "Now, 12 months from now, are we go- documents on staying safe in the working to be back to normal? I have no clue, I place, visions from architecture and design don't know," Garneau said. "It's still too ear- firms and projections from the real estate

> After just four weeks, they have develbe extremely helpful in the near term for

It wasn't easy. Design has to happen. help employers and employees to get back Product engineering has to happen. The into normal work mode, or a new normal, supply chain has to participate (and just and again be safe and secure where they as fast as Groupe Lacasse). The company used what it called a stage gate process for Physical distancing will certainly be im- new products or enhancements/improve-







ments — a methodic step-by-step system. "Obviously, in this case, we shrank everything," Garneau said.

in the latest technology. The company made massive investments in 2018 and 2019. Those investments are paying off. Without the glue line. high-tech manufacturing, Groupe Lacasse would not be able to move as quickly as it has or proand materials.

troduce laser technology for edge banding on laminate surfaces. minor improvement, it is a significant development for the company and its customers, especially in a time where ease of cleaning and sealed surfaces are critical.

A traditional work surface includes a substrate that has been laminated. Somehow the manufacturer adheres an edge to it. In Groupe Lacasse has benefited the past, it has always been glued from its continuous investment on, Glynn said. That always leads to that little line that goes around the circumference of the work surface, which is the very visible

"When you go into older installations and some newer ones, you can put your fingernails on or vide as many options for shapes put a pen in, and pull that away from the work surface, the sub-The company is the first to in- strate," he said, "We have introduced a new technology into the factory that is new in the market, Though this might seem like a that is laser installed. Through a laser beam — we call it the Fuse edge — you actually meld the edgeband to the substrate. So it is addressing the market is differeliminates the glue line, and you ent, Garneau said. BoF cannot pull it away."

This has some real advantages in a post-COVID-19 workplace, just by happenstance. It's much easier to clean. It has an antimicrobial tendency to it because nothing can get into that glue line where that space used to be. So it is very, very cleanable.

"That's the one advantage, but primarily it was in terms of durability," Glynn said. "It was introduced because of durability and the aesthetics. It's a very clean look. You do not see the matching edgeband. Designers really take to it quite nicely."

The virus has not changed Groupe Lacasse. It is still the highly focused company dealers love to partner with and customers love to work with. Still, the way it