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### Ergonomic Office Furnishings: Driving Productivity Further With No Circuitry

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## Ergonomic Office Furnishings: Driving Productivity Further With No Circuitry

By: Derek Timm, Technical Service Manager, WorkRite Ergonomics

During the 1990s at the height of the tech-heavy "dot com" era, the buzz around carpal tunnel syndrome initiated a great deal of attention on ergonomics and ushered in a new way of thinking: it's more cost effective to implement solutions that help avoid workplace injuries than to suffer the high cost of workers' compensation and lost time. The result? A surge of companies providing employees with wrist rests for their keyboards. Was this enough to ensure the ongoing well being and resulting productivity of the workforce?

Today's hi-tech office environment is a very different place than it was during the 1990s – it's more diverse and puts more demand on workers' time, resulting in longer work hours and more stress in our lives and upon our bodies. In fact, a diverse and productive, information-, service- and technology-based workforce is one of the main drivers of U.S. competitiveness in the global economy. With the country's manufacturing industry on the wane, it might indeed be the only driver. For the U.S. to remain competitive, tools must be provided that enable hi-tech workers to be more productive. However, being more productive also means staying healthy at work. Employers have no choice but to expand their knowledge of ergonomics, focusing on solutions that provide adjustability and flexibility for today's workforce.

Surprise! Technology Means More Work for Today's Workforce

Derek Timm



Derek Timm is Technical Services Manager for WorkRite Ergonomics Inc., ([www.workriteergo.com](http://www.workriteergo.com)), a leading provider of high-quality, innovative ergonomic products. The company's designs are flexible, easy-to-operate ergonomic solutions that can be tailored to any work environment and help create a healthy workplace

Today's businesses are defined by technology. We're able to send a message to a colleague across the globe while interacting with another colleague, via video conferencing on a laptop, while being continents apart. This is all happening as our laptop is sending orders to the bank to pay the bills. However, these technologies aren't the time-saving wonders the marketplace expected them to be for businesses and employees. In fact, it's the very opposite.

In the United States, the average number of hours worked by all employed people has been on the increase since the 1970s. With the advent of computers, personal digital assistants (PDAs), "texting" via cell phones, and the Blackberry phenomenon, most businesses are forced into addressing all matters in "real-time" to compete in the marketplace. Workers are increasingly expected to be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to answer any questions or take on the latest project. Hence, many

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workers put in longer hours than the traditional forty-hour standard, some even pushing 80 to 100 hours. Frequently, workers are even reluctant to take their full vacations without being in contact with the office out of fear that it might jeopardize their job security.

With the increasing amount of time people are spending in front of the computer, the need for ergonomic office solutions has never been more apparent than it is today. According to a study from WorkRite Ergonomics, more than 89 percent of nearly 500 office workers polled reported feeling muscle tension or fatigue at least occasionally at the end of their work-

days, and a full 16 percent feel this distress on a regular basis. Proper office furniture is paramount to the comfort of today's workforce. In fact, 92 percent of respondents would like a desk or workstation that could be adjusted for height, whether sitting or standing. The survey also shows that adjustable desks and accessories not only relieve physical aches and pains for workers, but they also can help alleviate management woes of lower productivity. Humans were never meant to sit in one spot for hours on end and it shows. This provides further evidence for the need for adaptable and height-adjustable work centers, enabling users to raise or lower the desk with the push of a button

based on their preferences.

Simple, flexible and easy-to-operate ergonomic solutions that can be tailored to any work environment help create a healthy workplace. Providing employees with furniture, tools and accessories such as monitor arms, desks, foot rests and keyboards that are adjustable to personal ergonomic needs can improve their productivity by allowing workers to configure their workspace for their greatest personal comfort.

Let's look at liquid crystal display (LCD) computer monitors as one way that ergonomics can help improve workers' production levels and comfort. With workstations decreasing on overall size, LCD monitors are easy to incorporate into anyone's workstation, compared to its bulky cathode ray tube (CRT) cousin. Ergonomic solutions such as adjustable monitor arms enable users to move the LCD monitors into any position needed, and adjust the monitor's position to meet individual preferences and specific task requirements. This makes it possible for any employee to benefit from correct posture and viewing when working, and frees up desk space.

#### Employee Productivity Gets a Boost With Two Screens

There are numerous reports proving the value of dual screens versus a single large screen. A study from Jon Peddie Research states "almost everyone contacted agrees there is a need for a multi-display system and believes he or she would realize increased productivity by having more screen space." The study explains how productivity can increase approximately 42 percent by employing dual screens. Even gamers have come to realize the benefits of dual screens for increased visualization of the playing field.



The Sierra™ series of height-adjustable work centers from WorkRite Ergonomics Inc., ([www.workriteergo.com](http://www.workriteergo.com)) uniquely addresses the diversity of the U.S. office demographic. Adjusting from 22" to 48", only Sierra meets the 5th percentile range and exceeds the 95th percentile specification from the Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturer's Association (BIFMA), thereby satisfying the needs of today's office worker from short (5'0") to tall (6'+).

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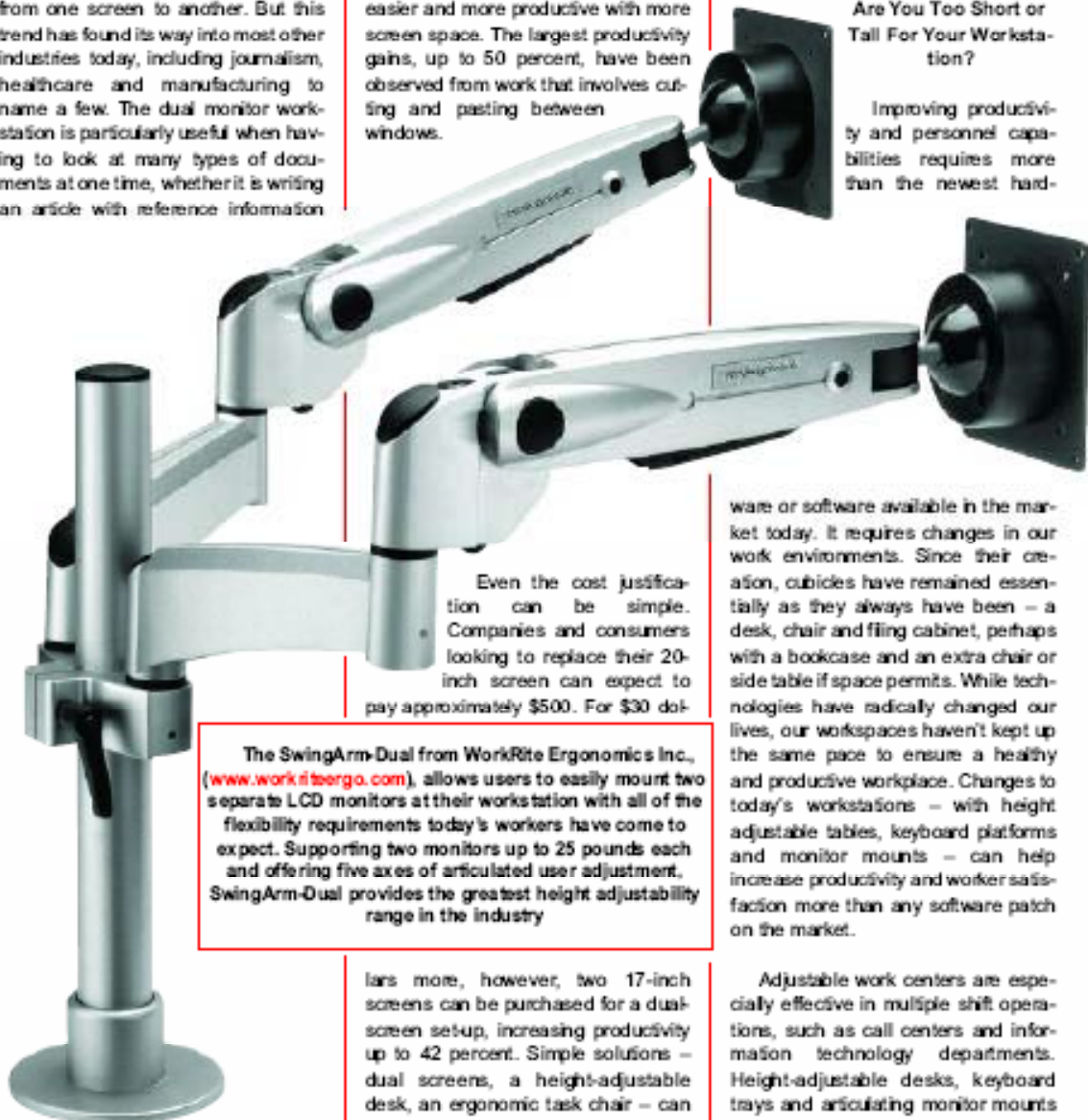
Multiple screens have commonly been used in the video editing and financial trading industries, enabling users to compare finances of multiple companies at a glance or drag images from one screen to another. But this trend has found its way into most other industries today, including journalism, healthcare and manufacturing to name a few. The dual monitor workstation is particularly useful when having to look at many types of documents at one time, whether it is writing an article with reference information

on the secondary screen or comparing blueprints for new buildings. Neatly anyone who works with more than one program, or more than one source of information, will find common tasks far easier and more productive with more screen space. The largest productivity gains, up to 50 percent, have been observed from work that involves cutting and pasting between windows.

be easy answers to complex questions that many managers and computer enthusiasts spend countless hours trying to solve.

Are You Too Short or Tall For Your Workstation?

Improving productivity and personnel capabilities requires more than the newest hard-



Even the cost justification can be simple. Companies and consumers looking to replace their 20-inch screen can expect to pay approximately \$500. For \$30 dol-

The SwingArm-Dual from WorkRite Ergonomics Inc., ([www.workriteergo.com](http://www.workriteergo.com)), allows users to easily mount two separate LCD monitors at their workstation with all of the flexibility requirements today's workers have come to expect. Supporting two monitors up to 25 pounds each and offering five axes of articulated user adjustment, SwingArm-Dual provides the greatest height adjustability range in the industry

ware or software available in the market today. It requires changes in our work environments. Since their creation, cubicles have remained essentially as they always have been – a desk, chair and filing cabinet, perhaps with a bookcase and an extra chair or side table if space permits. While technologies have radically changed our lives, our workspaces haven't kept up the same pace to ensure a healthy and productive workplace. Changes to today's workstations – with height adjustable tables, keyboard platforms and monitor mounts – can help increase productivity and worker satisfaction more than any software patch on the market.

lars more, however, two 17-inch screens can be purchased for a dual-screen setup, increasing productivity up to 42 percent. Simple solutions – dual screens, a height-adjustable desk, an ergonomic task chair – can

Adjustable work centers are especially effective in multiple shift operations, such as call centers and information technology departments. Height-adjustable desks, keyboard trays and articulating monitor mounts

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allow workers to adjust furniture to their needs, accommodating the diverse demographic of today's workers. Specific to height-adjusting tables, the height of work surfaces should allow comfortable and efficient posture of the upper arms, forearms and hands, and even allow for standing work.

Even keyboard position plays an important role in maintaining the health of workers today. A number of ailments can come from using a keyboard incorrectly – from short-term issues like sore wrists to long-term problems like Carpal Tunnel

Syndrome. Once present, they can be difficult or even impossible to reverse. Using the keyboard properly can help to avoid future problems. Use a system that is height adjustable and can tilt the keyboard away for better posture. Keyboard systems should enable users to maintain neutral shoulder, elbow and wrist postures. Also, make sure there's enough room for a mouse – often an overlooked consideration with many businesses.

Adjustable furniture, tools and accessories are helping to address the personal ergonomic needs of employers and employees by allowing

them to configure their workspaces to their needs. Businesses that have implemented ergonomics programs are reporting significant decreases in illnesses and health care costs over time, along with increases in productivity, product quality and worker satisfaction. In a time where the U.S. workforce is clocking in more hours regardless of the technological advancements available, simple ergonomic solutions can go a long way in helping to provide an improved environment for today's businesses, enabling people to work smarter without having to work harder.

