

Herman Miller - Cubix

Background

Office storage can be broadly divided into three categories - Active, Intermediate and Archive. In today's office these terms can be applied to physical content as well as digital. However, in terms of application, electronic and physical storage remain exclusive but from the users perspective they should be connected.

In the world of physical storage, there are a number of intelligent solutions from providers who understand the impact of bulky storage in cost terms. There are systems to help with retrieval but they all struggle to compete with the capacity discipline and speed of a computer network and an electronic data storage facility.

Think then about the ways people work and the growth of the knowledge economy and it seems outdated to only develop storage solutions around large steel carcasses which can trace their origins back to the wooden filing cabinet.

So Herman Miller started to ask questions around knowledge and information management and the kinds of tools and spaces a knowledge worker would need? In addition to paper, what kinds of things do they store? If we are more reliant on our laptops for research, creating and publishing work, then what kind of storage do we need?

To address this Herman Miller conducted an extensive piece of research which led to a design brief and a competitive selection process. The working title for the project was 'Applebox' to convey both the practical requirement of storage and the ambition of 'Apple - mac' with its exceptional user engagement and precision build quality.

We were asked along with a number of other leading design companies from around Europe to participate in the response to brief and were successful.

What followed was an intensive programme of exploration and trials, the result is Cubix launched at Orgatec in Cologne on 21 October 2008,



Cubix user scenario



A4 Cubix on Abak Environments spine assembly

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Although at one level Cubix is a storage product, it is not just about the storage of paper media. Considering the preferences and work styles of many different users, the elements of Cubix can meet the organisational needs of someone who is fully committed to a digital, electronic world, as well as those who need to use paper.

A pragmatic way to design a storage product is to identify what you want to store – usually files and paper and then develop a box around it. In the case of Cubix, we started from an altogether different angle. Encouraged by Herman Miller's experimental brief, the project identified the 'knowledge worker' as the target user and explored themes around personal space and territory, flexibility and placement and the need for personal control. The result is a compact, flexible and modern system designed to manage personal territory, desktop storage and technology.

Appearance

When a product occupies desktop space, the appearance and persona becomes more critical than say a storage pedestal tucked away out of sight. Understanding this, it was important to develop a viable yet engaging approach to the overall design. Using a few key components such as the main extruded planks and cast corner joints; we were able to create a highly adaptable and effective design. This method gave rise to the use of external skins – steel or aluminium inserts which provide a range of colour options to either match or contrast the frame. This method also produced a very crisp assembly, which is 'dry' so that each component of different material can be easily separated for recycling.



Cubix service box and light weight territory dividers



Glass fronted A5 box stacked onto a service box with integral power outlet

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Range

Cubix comprises a series of compact storage modules (A5 & A4) designed to house a range of media and personal items and is simply placed on the desk-top in front or to the side of the user, to provide convenient active storage and territory delineation. It is easy to re-locate and in some cases can be stacked and reconfigured.

The range includes a service unit that provides an integrated solution to desk-top power and data distribution as well as other storage capability. In addition, a range of trays can be used to either tidy small mobile devices and cables or paper media and other personal items. The trays can be subdivided and also used loose or in stacks.

A lightweight screen using a three dimensionally knitted membrane provides another flexible means of territory management.

Application

One application theme was the idea of 'placement', to make Cubix easy to install and possible to use across a number of desk ranges. Another theme was the idea of a low-rise architecture to maintain an open plan highly collaborative environment. The challenge here was to balance storage capacity against visual bulk.

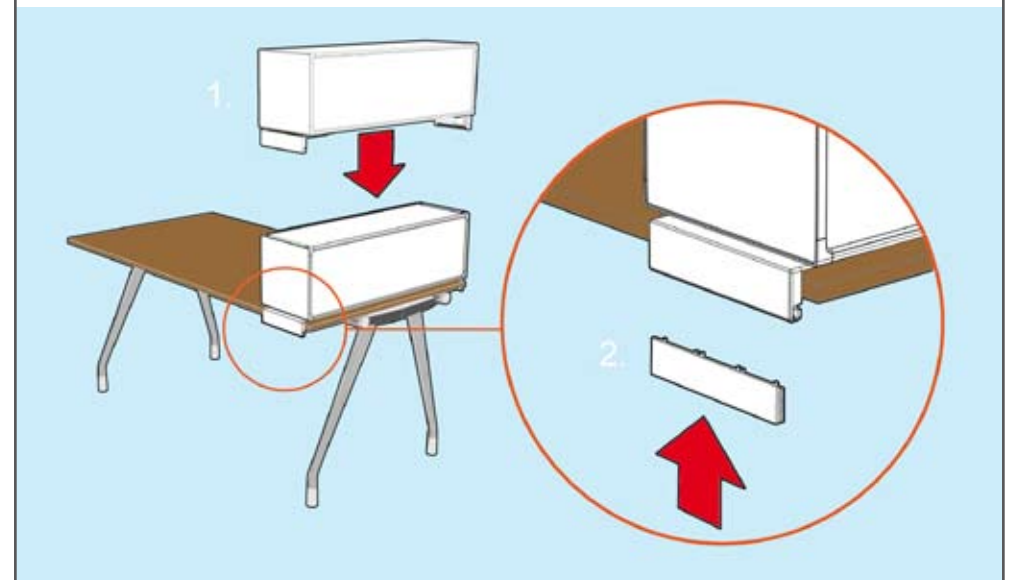
Adding value

With the rise of simple linear generic workstations or benches in place of desks, Cubix can add value to the users work space. As such it is not another commodity storage range, but sets out to address modern needs in a modern way.



A4 Cubix on the primary access of a 120° Sense

Cubix placed and located on the desk top



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