



Technology Spotlight

What is Sound Masking?

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With the advent of modern open-concept office plans that include either cubicles or tables, privacy has become a growing concern. Offices do have the need for confidential or private conversations to take place out of the earshot of other workers. Also, those who are working increase their productivity by eliminating distractions, which can take the form of background noise and conversations. Distractions also create interruptions, disrupting work flow and increasing stress.

Sound masking is the art of optimally installing special sound masking devices within an office environment to reduce noise distraction and create audible zones of quieter privacy. Sound masking actually adds more sound to the space, but it's not distracting sounds like conversations or construction work. Sound masking adds ambient sounds that are professionally engineered and similar to 'white noise,' like flowing water or a blowing fan. This ambient sound is pleasant to the human ear and covers up the negative noises.

Rather than eliminating the noise in the background, sound masking merely reduces it and covers it up. This enables different spaces and environments to still have conversations and phone calls; they just won't be as distracting. The area that the sound masking system covers is called the radius of distraction.

Sound masking works through three components in its overall system: an emitter which acts similar to a loudspeaker, a control module, and the cables that connect the emitters to the modules. Emitter technology contains drivers that emit different audio channels. All of the sounds are uniform in volume and equally unobtrusive. Emitters are usually mounted in the ceiling panels in order to cover the widest amount of area. The control modules come in three sizes depending on the space you need to mask. Modules can be wall or rack mounted. The cables are similar to Internet cables.

The space that needs sound masking is split into zones that can range from 100 square feet up to 12,000 square feet. Then the emitters are installed and the control modules dictate what exactly the emitters will transmit into the space, similar to a remote controlling a television's channels. As opposed to former indirect systems which relied on ceiling acoustics to reverberate and spread sound, direct sound masking systems disperse the auditory experience directly into the desired space. The sound is more consistent and can be controlled better through its corresponding module unit.



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2. Places Where Sound Masking Can Be Used

Sound masking systems can be used in a multitude of places, including office or corporate environments, retail stores, call centres, the finance industry, hospitals and doctors' offices, schools, universities, apartment buildings, galleries and museums, libraries, research labs, courtrooms, houses of worship, conference centres, and other types of facilities.

Sound masking can also be used in homes to create different auditory spaces for the occupants living there. Having a quiet room to escape the noise and distractions can benefit everyone.

Sound masking improves auditory privacy for everyone who uses the space. It affects the owners, facility managers, administrators, employees, customers, clients, and patrons. So, sound masking can be used to improve any environment where the acoustics are an important part of contributing to the overall satisfaction in the space.

3. Why is Sound Masking so Important Today?

The modern offices of today are designed around technology, so cubicles and open floor plans accommodate computer users much more effectively than private offices. The open use of space also facilitates creativity and collaborative team work environments between employees working on a similar project or within the same department. It's easier to speak to someone who isn't separated from you by a partition or a wall.

But that ease of speech also comes at the cost of distracting or disrupting fellow co-workers. Studies have shown that up to two-thirds of employees prefer a quiet working environment, where they can truly focus and work on projects, which are often under tight deadlines. Time is wasted when the person is constantly being disrupted or distracted by fellow conversations and office noises. It also can increase stress levels by not providing a comfortable