



Affirm'ed

By **ROB KIRKBRIDE**

When Office Master set out to create Affirm, its designers focused heavily on the seat. Working with wood models, the company created a “really perfect” contour.



Chairs seem to be born in one of two ways: The manufacturer is responding to market demand with customers asking for something new to fill a gap. The second way is when the manufacturer identifies the need through observations and research. The new Office Master Affirm chair has sprouted from the former, with a dash of the latter. It is a chair Office Master customers want so the company responded. And while executives there will humbly tell you that the customer drove the development of Affirm, the innovation, technology and execution behind the product comes from Office Master.

“When we develop a chair, we want to be responsive to our customers,” said Wilson Chow, president. “That is how our chairs evolve. And that’s the concept that drives Affirm. There are a lot of chairs (launched) every year. We don’t want to say to the marketplace that we know what you need. Instead, we work with so many professionals — facility managers, architects and designers — that it would be arrogant to come to them and say, ‘These

are the chairs we have and you should pick one of them.’ It is more responsible to ask them what they need and help them.”

The Affirm seating series sprung from what Chow calls a “constant set of requests” that came from its customers. While the company’s Yes seating series has a beautiful design, it has a more traditional look than Affirm, which is modern, hip, now.

When Office Master set out to create Affirm, its designers focused heavily on the seat. Working with wood models, the company created a “really perfect” contour to the chair seat, Chow said. Months of design were spent working on the seat contour. The designers focused on the problem and worked intently at solving it. “It’s all about what works for you; what makes you comfortable,” he said. “We are not making chairs for the eyes. We are making chairs that you will be comfortable in.”

Affirm goes beyond chair comfort “theory” and focuses on what really works and how users really sit in a chair, Chow said. Regardless of the chair, some users sit properly while others might perch forward or slouch back. Still others lean to one side or the other. Affirm is designed to work with every posture.

Affirm goes beyond chair comfort “theory” and focuses on what really works and how users really sit in a chair.

“Office Master is making something realistic,” he said. “Affirm works not just when you are sitting fully back into the chair to be comfortable. We found that we could design a seat cushion to be comfortable in a real way. Even right now, we might be sitting in the forward half of the seat. It is the reality of how we work; the reality of how we live. If we want a chair to be realistic, we need to create flexible sitting.”

Office Master worked on the cushion density to make sure it is comfortable. There is a contour to the seat from front to back that helps as well. Certainly, there are people who sit perfectly in an ergonomic office chair — in the so-called pocket — but many of us do not. While we are working, we might lean forward. Affirm will help the worker remain comfortable in the pocket and in the perch.

“I’m not advocating a person sit in a way that is not ergonomically correct,” Chow said, “but we can make a seat that is comfortable no matter how a person is sitting. We can set it up so comfort happens. Basically, we’ve created a chair that makes it easier to sit comfortably.”

Office Master listened to a lot of ergonomists who advocated a relatively flatter seat pan — not entirely flat, of course, but one with a more continuous curve. That’s why the Affirm seat is a bit flatter than usual, without

losing the look that designers want. The flatter seat gives comfort to the guy in the office who sits casually with his legs slightly spread and the same comfort to the woman who sits with her legs crossed or closer together. Both can sit with equal comfort.

Affirm is a bit flatter in the central area of the seat so people can move and sit how they are comfortable. “It’s about getting people more active, but it is also getting real about how people sit,” Chow said. “We are not promoting any one sitting position. People don’t want to be in any one position. If you are sitting frozen in one position or standing in one position, you are going to have problems. But let’s be realistic in how we sit, but also be comfortable.”

Affirm is a fully formed line with myriad options for designers and customers to choose from. There are choices in mesh and mechanisms. For example, mechanisms can be specified from the simple to the executive. Affirm uses a synchro tilt mechanism. “If you look around the marketplace, there is not another mesh chair like it. Our customers asked for another mesh chair option from us,” he said.

Affirm was created after hearing from customers, but it also was created based on Office Master’s observations on the marketplace and other seating products in the market. The company saw a need for a new mesh chair that doesn’t nickel and dime customers for the options necessary for the customers’ comfort and use.

Affirm has a rectilinear outline and a “frameless” mesh back. It is a contemporary design with multiple arm options and a variety of mechanisms. It is available in mid back, high back and high back with a headrest. A knit “jacket” is available to cover the mesh to give it a warmer look, but still have a translucent, light feel.

The chair officially launches at NeoCon East at the end of the month, but already, it is getting a fantastic response from those who have seen it a bit early. “Affirm is designed to enhance your experience,” Chow said. “It is an advanced option, which is what our customers asked us for, but it will still work well with the Yes seating series as well. Affirm is going to be a very nice compliment to the Yes series.”

Still, Affirm is a value as well. When Office Master talks about value, it is not talking about “cheap” seats. To Office Master, value means they won’t nickel and dime customers for options. “It is not overly priced; it is reasonably priced,” Chow said. “And Affirm is something we are very proud of.” 



