

PayPal's new customer service and operations center in La Vista, Neb., is just what the online payment service

PayPal: in the nick of time

firm ordered—a leading-edge facility that embraces e-commerce. Built in less than six months, it was also built in the nick of time.

We had reached capacity in our two existing Omaha facilities," says Ryan Downs, PayPal's vice president of operations. "We would have had a very difficult time keeping up with the demands of our growing business without adding the capacity of this new building and without adding it in the timeframe that we did."

Founded in 1998 and acquired by eBay® in 2002, PayPal has been growing to the tune of about 30,000 new customers a day. The company moved into its 115,200-sq.-ft. La Vista digs March 2003 with 600 employees. One year later, PayPal has nearly reached the building's planned occupancy of 1,300 people.



Dana Dubbs has spent more than a dozen years writing about the changing face of the workplace and its impact on people. Dana also writes for *Commercial Property News*, *Corporate Real Estate Strategies*, *Health Facilities Management*, *Operations & Fulfillment*, and the *National Urban League's Opportunity Journal*.

She is currently earning recognition as an art photographer. Her landscapes, abstracts of nature, and portraits of dolls have been exhibited in galleries and shows throughout California.

by Dana Dubbs

PayPal: in the nick of time, continued

The new operations center is all the things the old facilities weren't. The interior environment is largely open, designed for teaming, and features lots of built-in opportunities for communication and collaboration. It is a highly efficient space, light-filled, comfortable, and attractive. The building's glass skin affords views out for everyone. Diffusers in the raised floor give employees control over the volume and direction of air flow into workspaces. A large café,

fitness center, outdoor basketball court, and sand volleyball court are among the amenities.

The building is also one of the most flexible facilities on the planet. "We have a lot of changes in our business, and those changes happen very quickly," says Downs. "We needed a building that could be easily reconfigured, whether to add seats in certain places, conference rooms, or training facilities."

For Grand Rapids, Mich.-based Workstage™, a design-build firm that is a joint venture of Steelcase and real estate investment firm The Gale Co., meeting PayPal's tight timeframe and requirements for enormous flexibility was all in a day's work. Workstage uses streamlined processes throughout its building projects and takes a kit-of-parts approach to construction rather than build from scratch on site.





The operation center's raised floor, for example, contains pre-assembled, modular, plug-and-play systems for power, voice, data, HVAC, and lighting, which contributed significantly to the building's rapid construction. "Plug-and-play electrical, cabling, and underfloor air distribution systems eliminate the need for custom bending of electrical conduit," notes Aaron Bilyeu, sales rep for Workstage and the firm's liaison with PayPal. "These solutions completely eliminate junction boxes for electrician's and almost completely eliminate the need for ductwork in the facility."

Similarly, conference rooms are carved out of Steelcase I-Line moveable walls. Individual workspaces are made of Turnstone Kick systems furniture.

Workspace walls are Kick stackable panels. Everything can be disassembled and moved very easily.

"PayPal has the ability to reconfigure and re-tool this facility to meet changing business objectives," says Bilyeu. "They can reorganize teams, move people and furniture in a matter of hours or days instead of weeks or months."

Which is exactly what PayPal has been doing. "We've made something like 15 substantial changes over the last year, and they have been relatively affordable and easy to do," says Downs. "We have disassembled a couple different conference rooms, added cubicles, and changed the layout of training facilities to better fit our needs at a given time. We have done reconfiguration of

different areas to provide either lower walls or higher walls depending on the type of business a group is engaged in.

"They can reorganize teams, move people and furniture in a matter of hours or days instead of weeks or months."

"Internet connectivity, network connectivity, is essential to a business like ours, and this building has incredible capacity to serve us in that area," adds Downs. "We can deploy additional technology, remove technology, and re-route it very quickly as well."



Since moving into the building, PayPal has experienced lower attrition. Downs believes the environment has been a factor in that while also serving as a powerful recruiting tool.

"I've had hundreds of e-mails from employees about what a great place this is, how much they enjoy it, and how comfortable they are here," says Downs. "They tell all their friends around town which has helped our recruiting efforts. I've also talked to new candidates who say, 'I saw this building off the interstate, and it looks like a place where I would want to work.' Everything suggests that people enjoy

this facility, people notice it, and they want to be part of an organization that would have something like this."

Having Steelcase and Workstage involved in the project made all the difference for PayPal. "Steelcase helped give us a vision of the kind of building we wanted," says Downs. "We visited their facilities, saw different applications of their products, interacted with them about what was possible, and that helped us form the vision. Workstage has a product that is tied so closely to what Steelcase does that we were able to execute very well against the vision."

"Workstage is involved with the Steelcase think-tank team," notes Tim Ollmann, senior project manager, Workstage. "The team looks at overall facility planning and is continually evolving around the newest ideas in the industry as it pertains to workspace efficiency. Working with Steelcase, we have access to a lot of the latest and greatest in product development, and we try to implement those ideas and solutions into designs for our clients."

"The Workstage concept combines affordability with a stunning and effective work environment," says Downs. "And those are two hard things to combine."