

## **Big Data. Better Places.**

**Taking cues from users and applying Steelcase research insights, Workplace Advisor and the Steelcase Find app improve the places people work.**

**“Leaders walk around their offices and see empty spaces. Yet their people say they can’t find the right places to do their work.”**

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**JIM KEANE** | CEO, Steelcase

Most of us will concede that offices of the past, built to pack as many desks as possible into the least amount of space, were not human centered. Cookie cutter layouts and rows of desks may be easy to manage, but they can’t support today’s different ways of working. Organizations know that growth requires innovation, and this has fueled a shift to creative work. The ebb and flow of the creative process, and the need for agile teams to implement new ideas and solutions, require a range of spaces that support different work modes, and give workers choice and control over where and how they work.

“Leaders walk around their offices and see empty spaces. Yet their people say they can’t find the right places to do their work: space to meet with colleagues, team spaces to work on tough problems for long periods or a private space for focused work. How can both situations be true? It’s like entering a busy parking lot, knowing there’s a space but you don’t know where it is,” says Steelcase CEO Jim Keane.

Workplace Advisor helps organizations more fully understand their workplaces so they can create better ones.

This is the challenge Steelcase designers addressed with Steelcase’s portfolio of space measurement solutions, which includes Workplace Advisor and Steelcase Find. Workplace Advisor, available now, helps organizations more fully understand their workplaces so they can create better ones. It will be followed by Steelcase Find, a mobile app that will help employees find the workspaces and colleagues they need.

“We’re using technology, big data, and workplace insights to help companies create human-centered workplaces that are not only responsive to today’s work processes, but informed by the needs and experience of people at work today,” says Keane. “Workplace Advisor provides the company with data and insights on how to think about space holistically, and helps create smart, connected workplaces. It will also inform Personal Assistant, to help people connect with their colleagues and the best places to work, so they can spend less time searching and more time connecting and collaborating.”

Locating colleagues and an appropriate place to work will be just a few smartphone taps away.

## LIKE A FITBIT FOR THE OFFICE

Workplace Advisor was built on the Microsoft Azure IoT platform and uses strategically placed sensors and gateways to track precise, real-time space usage, identifying which rooms are open versus ones that are reserved but sitting empty. Newly-engineered sensors, precisely located in each workspace, allow Workplace Advisor to achieve great accuracy. In addition, proprietary algorithms apply Steelcase's deep knowledge of work, workers and the workplace to extract meaning from the data and display it in a real-time, intuitive user interface.

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The insights revealed by Workplace Advisor are often surprising. Jenny Carroll, user interaction designer, says one reason is that most businesses are unaware of how their space is actually used. She also notes that 46 percent of space goes unused in a typical workplace. “Work is changing so quickly, you can’t really prescribe how a room is used. People use conference rooms for phone calls. Groups collaborate in open lounge spaces. Some people roam around as they talk on a phone. Having real-time data about your work environment helps you understand user behaviors, how people work, and how space can help them. Workplace Advisor is like a Fitbit for the office.”

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## YOUR PERSONAL WORKPLACE CONCIERGE

Steelcase Find, the user tool available later this year, is a mobile app that functions like a workplace concierge, harnessing information from Workplace Advisor. It will allow users to easily find the best places to work based on the type of space they need, the number of people in a meeting, tools and technology required and the amenities of the space.

Steelcase Find will evolve (both the app and Workplace Advisor are offered via a continuous update model commonly used with software products and services) to integrate with Microsoft Outlook and Steelcase Room Wizard, the web-based room scheduling system. The app will link personal calendars with the workplace, so employees can quickly find colleagues and book spaces. No time-sucking wandering around in search of a space or wondering if an empty meeting room is available. Locating colleagues and an appropriate place to work will be just a few smart phone taps away.

Steelcase Find will also let users rate workspaces and give feedback on how they work, giving organizations a deeper sense of what people need in the workplace. Learnings grow exponentially as users rate rooms, available technology, privacy, distractions and other factors. Over time, companies learn what employees need most and why, and can in turn improve the work environment.

Workplace Advisor provides both continuous, real-time data for ongoing management of the workplace and a space measurement study over a fixed period of time, usually one to three months. It pairs data insights into workspace usage with feedback from employee surveys to create a complete analysis of the work environment, which can be an invaluable tool before or after a capital expenditure.

Real estate needs to pay for itself. If there is an underutilized room, there is a need to understand why. Workplace Advisor gives you real-time data, so you don't guess how well a space is working, it's a knowable fact.

## **DATA-DRIVEN DESIGN**

Workplace Advisor was beta tested at 20 different businesses, from insurance and financial companies to design firms and legal offices. The Los Angeles office of design firm DLR Group tested Workplace Advisor for over a year. Alison Marik Zeno, DLR's workplace sector leader, says that even with the experience and expertise of the 150-person firm, "we wanted more data-driven, evidence-based design."

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For example, DLR has four large conference rooms, each with the same footprint, technology and whiteboards. Two are traditional boardrooms, and two support alternative postures with lounge seating and standing-height worksurfaces. "Based on anecdotal evidence, we believed the alternative posture conference rooms were more popular. Workplace Advisor proved that they're used 64 percent of the time, versus 30 percent for the more traditional space—they're used twice as much."

Data from beta sites provide early insights on how space is used by industries and individuals. For instance, people at financial firms use their physical workplaces more (65 percent) than people at design firms or advertising agencies (40–50 percent)—maybe it's just the nature of the industry, or maybe creative teams need different kinds of space than they have today. Another insight: Adding height-adjustable desks increases a room's use, regardless of industry.

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## **PRIVATE, SECURE, SMART & CONNECTED**

Customers who use Workplace Advisor and Steelcase Find own and control their own data. “The Microsoft Azure platform has a very strong security and privacy guarantee. Data belongs to the customer and we ensure its sovereignty and privacy,” says Sam George, director of Azure IoT, Microsoft. “The Microsoft Azure platform provides leading-edge scalability and protection of customer data on the cloud.”

The personal location tracking tool feature of Steelcase Find has an opt-in user choice, so people can turn it on or off based on their preferences. “If you’re searching for a local restaurant on your mobile device, it’s like letting an app know your location,” notes Carroll, “Not everyone chooses it, but it sure makes it easier to find a nearby restaurant.”

## **MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR PEOPLE**

Many of the interventions that improve underutilized space and help change a process-driven office into a smart and connected workplace don’t cost a great deal. “It’s often a change in how the space is used, or adding film to a glass wall to improve privacy, or just a re-orientation of the furniture that can change behavior,” says Carroll. “But small changes can make a big difference to the people who work in these spaces.”

“It’s all about making the organization more agile, resilient and responsive. The right workplace can shift mindsets, fuel employee engagement and foster creativity,” says Keane. “Big data, new technology and insights gained over time about work and the workplace can make a huge difference.”

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