

Work Hospitality

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The fully hosted, 10,000-square-foot Workspring at 30 W. Monroe St. in the heart of Chicago's Central Loop—a destination now considered the flagship of the Workspring brand—offers a palette of technology-infused studios and task-oriented spaces geared toward stimulating an optimum work experience for groups and individuals on an as-needed basis.

John Malnor, vice president of growth initiatives for Steelcase, calls it “charismatic” space.

In much the same way that an upper-echelon fitness club offers members the latest equipment, comforts and personal services as needed, Workspring embraces the philosophy of “collaborative consumption,” a business model gaining momentum based on the concept of sharing rather than owning resources.

It's an attractive option for companies that don't have the real estate—or the financial resources for expansion—to host group and team meetings, as well as for off-site staff, satellite employees and independent professionals seeking premium office space in which to work and meet clients.

And it offers businesses refreshing and invigorating space away from the everyday office to tackle critical projects within a tailored setting that places a high priority on gracious hosting, equipped with the latest tools and ergonomic seating. Workspring's “work hospitality” aspires to fulfill every need—from whiteboards, paper and supplies to nutritional food and snacks—thus nurturing quality results.

“When you walk in, people know your name, you feel like you're important, you feel cared for and, hopefully, when you leave, you're healthier than when you came in,” Malnor says. “We want to make everything evoke curiosity and interest. We want it to be so good, it's like the caffeine in Starbucks. You feel a craving for it.”

Ultimately, that means heightening the work experience: Workspring echoes the service of a five-star hotel for corporate coworking members and those using suites for group sessions. It offers everything from secure wireless Internet access, personal lockers and favorite beverages to high-definition videoconferencing.

“How can we be there to help you when you need us, but never bother you when you don’t?” Malnor says of the concierge-style service. “We want to help people do their best work.”

Customers are not focusing on the individual furniture. They see that as part of what created the compelling experience. Where we lead in the marketplace is our knowledge of work. We know how to create a great experience,” says mark Greiner, chief experience officer for Steelcase.

Steelcase has partnered with Marriott Hotels to develop a Workspring within the Redmond Marriott Town Center outside Seattle, Washington, a 6,000-square-foot facility designed for business travelers and those seeking collaborative environments for small meetings.

Frank Graziano, principal Steelcase researcher in Business Concept Development for WorkSpace Futures, sees unlimited potential in hotel partnerships. “We helped paint an opportunity landscape for them,” he says. “Could they be the new workplace 10 or 15 years from now? This is the first step in us collectively trying to serve that market. It will take a little while for that to develop.”

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The seeds of Workspring date back to 2006, when Steelcase researchers documented two significant workplace trends: fast-emerging technologies with bandwidth expansion that allow people “to work from everywhere” using mobile devices and increasingly complex business problems that require multiple perspectives and group collaboration.

Greiner recognized that changes in business economics and a tougher competitive environment also required the company to find ways to “generate more value in the eyes of our customers.”

Inspired in part by books such as “The Experience Economy” by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, which emphasizes the importance of client experiences in stimulating economic growth, Greiner led researchers to “create an experience of work that would be more highly valued” by Steelcase customers. “The future is not just about the stuff we make. It’s about the experience we create.”

The team spent two years researching and developing what would become Workspring. The first site—the 5,000-square-foot 12 East Ohio building in Chicago’s River North Neighborhood—opened in the fall of 2008, focused primarily on the team collaboration and group meetings market.

The much larger 30 W. Monroe location opened in January 2013 with a broader array of work space options that Malnor says leverage “all the tools that Steelcase has developed over the years.”

It targets four distinct markets: corporate coworking for individuals, group and collaborative meetings, extended projects and social events, all of which benefit from natural light amid a “free-flowing, feel-good organic space,” says Danielle Galmore, director of New Business Development for Steelcase and managing director of Workspring. The site boasts a “forum” for coworking, a “library” for quiet personal tasks and “heads-down contemplative” work, focus booths, seven styles of collaborative studios with seating at different postures, exchange spaces between studios for breakout sessions and private areas for phone conversations.

With the world rapidly “untethering people from the office,” Greiner says Workspring offers a dynamic new alternative. “It’s all about groups working in a very mobile society.”

And that work is happening in an economic climate that has more companies eyeing collaborative consumption when it comes to real estate, a high-capital fixed asset. As Greiner puts it: “It’s allowing companies to say, ‘Why do I need to buy something when I can share it when I need it?’”

Malnor says the prime Chicago location of the 30 W. Monroe Workspring—chosen for its vibrancy, historic status, structural beauty and access to transportation, restaurants and other services—makes it highly attractive.

Workspring provides access to the best technology, such as media:scape- integrated technologies designed to help people connect and collaborate more effectively.

“In this place, for less money than you would rent the smallest office possible in Chicago, you can sit in the corner window office, you can go into a private office, you can have a meeting with a team, you can host 40 people for a day. You can sit quietly or you can sit with a group,” he says. “You can choose your level of engagement and you can choose the type of work space you want. Very few small companies or large companies offer you that kind of solution.”

Sprawling conference rooms maintained by many companies, for instance, sit idle much of the time.

Workspring allows employers to get access to “the best technology, the best space, the best furniture and the best location,” but only when necessary, says Greiner, noting Workspring also has appeal as a green initiative. “It says the money they do spend for space-related expenses is optimized: I’m spending it when I need it, where I need it.”

And for off-site employees and independent professionals, Workspring offers high-performance, connected space away from the home or hotel room.

At 30 W. Monroe, Workspring’s service menu for individuals offers a monthly membership for unlimited daily access, a limited plan for up to five full days a month, or a day pass. Studios with flexible configurations can be rented for group sessions for half-days or full days; groups can arrange exclusive use of secure, lockable project suites for long-term tasks lasting weeks or months. Workspring also hosts corporate social events, presentations and educational programs, with arrangements for special catering as needed.

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The Workspring experience starts from the moment one arrives. Trained staff members greet visitors, who can review the day's latest news on a Workspring-provided iPad as they stroll in and enjoy a cup of coffee or a nutritional breakfast.

"You notice when you walk in, you walk into the kitchen," Malnor says. "Where does everybody gather when they come to your home? Everybody gathers in the kitchen. There's a human thing about sharing bread together. It's just a core human, social thing.

"Someone looks up and smiles and says welcome. We'll know if you have a peanut allergy or if you like cream with your coffee or you prefer a latte versus a cappuccino. We'll know which window seat you like. We'll know more about you than probably most of your co-workers ever knew because we're looking at everything you do and thinking of how we can make your day better."

That means offering healthy, light food, locker space for boots, backpacks and jackets, supplies as diverse as recyclable markers, disinfectant wipes, lint rollers and power cords. Security is paramount with card-key access and individual security cameras. Special precautions are taken for corporate clients seeking privacy for meetings about product launches and confidential matters.

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MARK GREINER | chief experience officer for Steelcase

Workspring is mostly about ensuring workers' well-being, a pillar of the brand. Consequently, Workspring pays attention to detail with subtle environmental touches. Designers of the window-rich space ensured users would "always have a nice sightline or a nice view in the space," Malnor says. "As you walk around this space, you'll notice that everywhere you look, you'll get an outside view where you get natural light. And almost everywhere has something that's alive and green and beautiful. These are little touches that bring a kind of humanity to the space."

Graziano of WorkSpace Futures says the research team “worked hard to develop a very experiential offering” for Workspring that focused on gracious hosting to serve clients with “a degree of presence, subtlety, humility and kindness without interfering with their work.” The inviting atmosphere ranges from a pale blue “Workspring color” on some walls to induce “a nice respite for the mind” to felt-covered hangers that don’t rattle in lockers. Graziano calls them “little micromoments” that add up: “It’s the set of elements that create an experience, a set of intangibles, that collectively are integrated into a very nice feeling for those who come to visit.”

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JOHN MALNOR | vice president of growth initiatives for Steelcase

The proof is in clients’ reactions: surveys show customer satisfaction with Workspring is extraordinarily high, scoring an average of 5 out of 5 in recommending Workspring to others. “They come back because of that high hospitality,” says Galmore, who analyzed and helped develop Workspring’s brand and service model. “As the world has gotten more do-it-yourself, people appreciate it when they’ve got a group that will do it for you. They gravitate toward the fact that we have this highly-hosted experience.”

Workspring also gives cost-conscious clients access to cutting-edge technological resources and tools such as media:scape, and high-definition video-conferencing.

With its holistic approach and contemporary design, the Workspring experience caters to a broad range of players in the marketplace. It lets small startup companies “elevate their game in terms of the space they have,” giving them an elegant environment to “make the pitch for their million-dollar proposal and the client never sees the garage they’re working out of,” Malnor says. It also fills a niche need when “the coffee shop is too loud and too public, and the office is too non-social, non-exciting, non-exhilarating. This is a middle ground. It’s more private and more exciting than an office.”

That sort of experience piqued the interest of leading innovation and design consulting firm IDEO of Palo Alto, Calif., which has historic ties to Steelcase. The company, instrumental in developing milestones such as Apple’s first mouse and the Steelcase Leap chair, is partnering with Steelcase on a Workspring® pilot in a building on its California campus.

Envisioned as a custom-suited facility that will “fit the character” of Palo Alto, Malnor calls it an “in- market prototype” that will serve IDEO and its clients, along with other customers. “It’s going to be a very interesting space, informal and creative, a California Workspring,” Malnor offers.

The Chicago and California sites spotlight another dire need satisfied by Workspring-enabled buildings: “Developers everywhere are struggling to fill their buildings,” Greiner says. “It’s another big opportunity to put in something like a Workspring as a benefit of the space.”

Tenants of Chicago’s Inland Steel Building, for example, not only benefit from the convenience and proximity of Workspring, but from special pricing for membership and use of the studios. It’s an enhancement of building space that can induce tenants to stay longer and even pay more for their leases.

“I think we have a strong appetite to see how far this could go. I’d like to see a global footprint,” says Galmore, who sees potential for extending and evolving the Workspring service model across platforms, through franchises, affiliates and partnerships with building owners and other businesses. “All the parts and pieces have come together in this really great puzzle.”

Workspring transforms the traditional view of the office by providing a diverse range of work settings that help companies rethink their real estate footprint and appeal to an increasingly mobile work force.

In the end, Greiner says, the appeal of Workspring is in the experience, one that clients find exhilarating in a work environment that transcends the typical.

“Customers are saying, ‘Don’t just give me the ingredients for a great cake or even the recipe.’ More and more of them are saying, ‘Why don’t you just bake the cake for me?’ That’s what Workspring is: the cake.”

Malnor sees it as the next chapter in the company’s history of enhancing and advancing the way we work. “We’re building on the shoulders of 100 years of work that Steelcase has done,” he says. “It’s a logical extension of the Steelcase vision.”

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