

## Meet Loftwall: Founder Q+A

### The founder of Loftwall describes his vision for adaptive workspaces

Steve Kinder founded Loftwall in 2008 with a vision towards adaptive workspace solutions rooted in simplicity and flexibility. We spoke with Steve last week from their Dallas headquarters about the beginnings of Loftwall and some of the trends he's been seeing in the workspace environment.

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#### **360: What were the origins of Loftwall?**

**Steve Kinder:** Ever since I got out of school, I was living and working in lofts and open spaces. My education is in furniture design and industrial design from the Rhode Island School of Design and early on when I was working at design firms, we were never big fans of cubicles and were always trying to be a little more open and collaborative. But we could never really refine it, and that was always interesting to me. I felt like there was something out there beyond the cubicle-wall world.

Then, I did have a stint in the trade show industry doing exhibit design. That taught me a lot about modular walls and some of those technologies. At some point, I had a chance to break out on my own and start a trade show/event consulting company where we were doing a lot with modular aluminum walls. It became interesting because we were doing trade show booths and we had clients who started asking us to build some pieces for their offices. This was around 2005-2007. They would say, "We need some walls built for our open office. We need something but we don't want it to be permanent, and we want to put our logo on it and brand it." I did that for a few of our clients on the side and they would say, "No one makes this kind of thing. You should start another business just doing this. Because no one else has a product like it." When the economy turned in 2008, we were a little less busy and it occurred to me that now might be the time to take this idea and see if we could make it work.

#### **360: How did you know Loftwall was going to work?**

**SK:** When we did our first show in 2009 in New York, we got tremendous feedback. But like any new idea, it takes time for it to get traction. You need to educate people and let them see the benefits. So, it took a few years. We started seeing that we were filling a void for customers. There were a lot of decorative screen options, but there wasn't a system that could be a foundation for an entire office footprint to become flexible and need driven. And that's what Loftwall can do.

#### **360: What positive trends are you seeing in the industry now?**

**SK:** Diversity of the work environment is very positive. The rise of these third, fourth, and fifth-type spaces and mobility within the office/work environment. We, as a company, want to be a facilitator and encourage that. Our own methodology is that we have individual, group, and collaborative spaces. Individual spaces need to encourage head down focus and personal space. Group spaces need to inspire dialogue, engagement, and those kind of processes in meetings. And then you have collaborative areas that can be lounge environments, game areas, or cafes that become a complement to the environment but also support culture and community.

We see these ancillary spaces are the environments where we can play a role in helping them be created and demarcated. I think that's positive. There remain a lot of issues with distraction and acoustics, and we see that as an opportunity for our products. We're focusing on acoustical material, absorption, abatement, as well as simple visual privacy. It's really important to be conscious of the different modes of work and to keep those modes in mind as you design the space. We see ourselves as being able to promote and enable that kind of thinking.

**360: Where do you see the biggest changes coming in the next 10 years?**

**SK:** I think the physical environment businesses tie themselves to is really going to change in the next 10-20 years. It's going to become less about designing spaces for companies and more about creating environments conducive to the work that needs to get done. It will no longer be— "This is our office, this is how you work, this is where you're going to work." It'll become—"Hey, we need this done. Here's your budget. What do you need to get it done?" I think how that impacts the way we serve our clients is going to be a really interesting thing to watch over the coming years.

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