

SMART's Global Headquarters

by Nancy Knowlton

In mid-November 2008, SMART began its staged move into its new global headquarters in Calgary, Alberta. Under construction for over two years, the building comprises three wings connected by walkways. The west wing is two and a half stories, the center wing is four and a half stories and the east wing is five and a half stories. The half story means that the first level is half underground and half above ground.

The new building is important for SMART because it brings almost all of our Calgary team under one roof. After having been spread out over seven buildings for the last number of years, being all together has great appeal. Beyond the newness factor, we have taken a deliberate approach to creating what we hope will be an enjoyable and productive workspace for our team and something that will interest people globally who care about group collaboration.



Thinking about Work

Most buildings split personal and shared space 80:20 – workstations and offices take 80 percent of the space, and meeting rooms and other common space take 20 percent.

In companies that are examining the way that their teams function, there is a trend emerging toward more collaborative space and less personal space, with the new recommended allocations set at 60:40. We have strongly adopted this latter approach, with close to 90 meeting rooms and other collaborative spaces throughout the building.

People need quiet space where they can concentrate and create. They also need space where they can get together to toss around ideas and co-create. These spaces peacefully coexist in the building, producing feelings of both calm and energy.

Thinking about the Environment

The new building will meet the LEED Gold standard. In doing the right thing for the environment, we naturally got to this level – it really was quite simple in hindsight. Although most of us will occupy the building for only a relatively short period of time, we had an eye on the long term environmental footprint of the building. Our green

thoughts started right at the basics of site selection. The LRT (light rail transit) station is a few minutes' walk away. It is easy to bike to the building from many parts of the city. We're just off a major transportation artery. Staff have a great number of options in terms of getting to work.

For those who choose to or need to drive, we put a parkade under the building. While there was enough space for ground-level exterior parking, we choose to do the environmentally responsible thing and not create a heat-island effect from a large parking lot.

We used recycled and local materials where we could. We will leave our site as natural as we can from a landscaping perspective, neither watering, fertilizing nor cutting the natural prairie grass.

Thinking about Personal Elements

Each workspace has its own personal comfort control system to deliver the right amount of heat and air. Chairs are ergonomic. Flat-screen monitors are off the desk. Outside heat and light are moderated with automatic shades. There are phone booths for private conversations.

Those staff with young children will have the peace of mind of an on-site, professionally managed daycare. Eliminating the worry associated with dropping off and picking up children is a major stress relief.

Personal fitness can be attended to in the on-site workout facility and in the adjacent park with its established exercise circuit.

A Responsibility

Building something of this scale is a responsibility. It will last longer than those of us who oversaw its design and construction. It will inspire people who drive by and work within its walls for many years.

When the community in which it is located welcomed us with such positive words during the development-permit hearing, we knew that we had to think about our impact on the community as we designed and built our building.

Out of this building will come the products that will inspire and engage a generation of young learners around the world. We'll design and deliver products to corporations and governments that will speed their work and cut their costs. And for us, it won't seem like work, because our new environment will be so conducive to creativity and collaboration.

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