

WPP/Team Detroit



Advertising/Public Relations; Dearborn, MI

Workplace Issues:

- Image/Branding
- Open Environment
- Space Utilization

Applications:

- Collaboration/Team
- Conference
- Open Office
- Private Office

Project Scope: 1,272 occupants; 1,272 workstations; 286,000 square feet

Herman Miller Products:

- Resolve System

Programs/Services:

- Asset Inventory Management (AIM)
- Mock-up Program

Year Completed: 2007



Walk into the offices of Team Detroit and you'll feel like you've entered the Land of Oz and actually, you have. Because that's what they call this incredibly innovative, colorful, fulfilled—and functional—environment. With everything from a vintage Ford pick-up truck to a “mad scientist” area to an abstract Airstream trailer, you'll quickly realize you're in a whole new work world.

Its conception began when WPP, a British holding company, decided to co-locate six advertising agencies it owned into one space. The intent was to consolidate support functions, such as HR and IT, while maintaining the identities of each of the agencies, some of the most well-known in the industry.

Logistically, it presented an unprecedented challenge for Gensler, the design firm charged with the task of creating the new environment. The project involved moving 1,200 people from six different locations into four floors in two separate buildings in two phases, under killer timelines with deadlines that could not be missed. To add to the complexity, the first installation had to be during the holiday break, December 28.

To help them accomplish their multi-faceted mission, they chose to work with WorkSquared in Novi, the second largest Herman Miller dealership in Michigan and a highly capable and well-run organization.

Todd Baisch, Gensler Principal, says he was impressed with their entire staff. “You have to have the right kind of people for this type of project,” he says. “They had the experience and know-how, and we all worked together as a team.”

Gensler and WorkSquared began exploring furniture solutions early on. “Our two biggest challenges were working with so many agencies and trying to retain their brands to some degree and hitting the high density targets we had to have to make this economically viable,” explains Baisch.

The space also had to be highly functional and open to support collaboration; aesthetically inspirational to feed creativity; and cohesive enough to look unified, yet allow for some group branding within this cross-agency community.

A trip to Herman Miller for the entire design team was very productive, recalls Baisch. “We decided on Resolve for the majority of the workstations because of its 120-degree footprint, which allowed for density and created a team-oriented layout. It also offered flexibility that enabled different types of layouts, which could easily be rearranged and changed as necessary.”

M-Wall was chosen for both private offices and conference areas. “We had four very different office configurations with common components, depending on the job function. The intensive coordination of shop drawings took teamwork and organization. But everyone did a great job,” recalls Baisch.

He says the mock-up phase was especially helpful in determining the right aesthetic and footprints for end users. WorkSquared designer Kate Stewart, who worked with Gensler from the start, agrees. “We really put our products to the test with mock-ups,” she says. “Because Gensler’s creative vision was so ‘out of the box,’ none of the products we were using were standard; it was almost special order. The mock-ups really helped us to see what would work and what wouldn’t.”

As the space neared completion and December 28 drew closer, WorkSquared Project Manager Roseann Blahnik held meetings on an almost daily basis. “We identified and discussed risks continually, and had a game plan if any of those risks came into play,” she says. “There were so many variables, we had to look at everything and say, ‘If this doesn’t happen, we can do this.’”

“Things had to be done simultaneously, not consecutively, in order to meet deadlines, so there was always a lot happening at once,” says WorkSquared’s Director of Design, Barbara Church, who dedicated a year and half to the project and kept everyone on track. “She had a soft approach, but the message was clear: ‘Let’s move it!’ I very much appreciated the way she kept us all going,” says Baisch.

And then the client threw another challenge into the mix: asset management for the nearly \$9 million of office furniture that was going to be installed. But it wasn’t just a matter of keeping inventory, says Blahnik. “They needed to know not only how many chairs there were, but exactly which model it was, when it was purchased, which office it’s in and who’s sitting in it.”

For that piece, they turned to Herman Miller’s Asset Inventory Management (AIM) team. “They came up with a really terrific bar code system that uses a hand-held scanner,” says Blahnik. “So you can walk into the any of Team Detroit’s offices, scan any piece of furniture, and it will give you all the necessary information.”

“The nice thing about AIM is that it can be ‘tweaked’ very easily when a customer needs something above and beyond normal inventory management,” says Tim Stayman, AIM technical specialist. “The key is having the people and processes in place to manage a complex system like this,” adds Ben Wieringa, AIM program lead. “Otherwise, it won’t work. But WorkSquared did a great job of putting it all together, then using the tools to do what they’re supposed to do.”

Move-in weekend was an “all hands on deck” affair. Blahnik recalls that “at one point, I was on the main floor thinking, ‘Oh, my gosh, we only have eight hours to install 100 Resolve workstations!’ I left, and when I came back an hour later, every single pole, post, screen, and work surface was put together. I think we finished one whole floor in six hours.”

It’s a great example of what experience, know-how, teamwork, and cooperation can accomplish.

Looking around the Team Detroit offices today, it is a wondrous and magical place, one that supports work with imaginative solutions and brings people together in all sorts of new ways. (It was featured in the May ‘08 issue of Interior Design magazine.)

“The best thing is that the users are really engaged in the space,” states Baisch. “They’re realizing how effective an open plan is and how it’s improved their communications and connections to one another.”

“This was one of the most challenging and exciting projects our team has ever worked on,” adds Barbara Church. “And also one of the most satisfying.”

Photo credit Chris Barrett, Hedrich Blessing



