

a customer story

travel and leisure

Call center tells employees: “You are important to us.”



Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd.

Credits:

Steelcase Applied Research
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You will often hear lip service paid to front-line employees who deal directly with customers, but the fact is that call center employees are usually low on the corporate totem pole. As a result, of course, they come and go.

At Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. (RCL), it's different. “Two groups are key to our success,” says Russ Bogue, a designer who is also director of global facilities and properties at RCL, a global cruise vacations company with more than 40,000 employees worldwide. “They are our ship-based staff who interact with guests, and our customer service staff in our call centers, who maintain our relationship with our distribution system – the travel agents.”

So when RCL needed to build a new call center, Mr. Bogue asked himself as the designer of the new facility: “How can I reinforce their importance?”

The answer was to build a workplace that communicates the message. “As you drive up, as you walk into the building, as you do your work or take a break or have a meeting, it says: ‘You are important to us.’”

RCL already had a model in place. Its award-winning Wichita, Kansas, customer contact center was built in 1997 as an idyllic Caribbean-style village. But it couldn't handle more growth. The company instead looked to duplicate Wichita's success in Springfield/Eugene, Oregon, a community of 250,000 with a ready-and-willing workforce that spanned four generations.

RCL called in Steelcase Applied Research to conduct a post-occupancy study of the

Wichita facility to learn how to recreate and embed the RCL culture in a new location while establishing itself as an employer of choice with cross-generational appeal.

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The Steelcase team rolled out its user-centered discovery process, which took focus groups of about 40 Wichita employees through a series of workshop exercises to draw out information and opinions about the way they work.



A less hierarchal “wave” pattern of Answer workstations allows for greater collaboration and communication amongst team members

The research team’s discoveries became the project’s primary source of basic data. It learned, for example, that it was important to communicate the history of RCL in order to embed the culture of the organization in a new group of employees. The research also emphasized a wide variety of environmental issues.

With respect to space allocation and layout, the studies found that people in entry positions felt their smaller workstations expressed low status compared to more experienced employees. All employees also identified a need for more space for quick and informal meetings among teams within work groups, and for “town hall” space that would bring all employees together.

The new building opened in Springfield in January 2006. While drawing on the success of Wichita, the new call center ventured out in new directions. With a contemporary look, it adopted the nautical features of a cruise ship such as portholes, white metal, dark green glass and curving architecture. Wide windows make the facility as open and bright as a ship’s deck with soothing views of the western landscape.

In fact, RCL took the trouble to use the building to make a statement about its long-standing commitment to the natural environment. It constructed the facility to meet the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) gold certification standard – a prestigious level that only 15% of all LEEDS buildings achieve. This meant meeting environmental requirements through energy and water conservation, as well as rainwater capture, filtration and cooling before diversion to the salmon-heavy McKenzie River. And of course, the Steelcase furniture is all Greenguard-certified, avoiding the use of certain paints, solvents, adhesives and other substances that emit harmful volatile organic compounds, or VOCs.

The Steelcase research guided many innovations to the interior design and layout of the call center as well.

As employees and visitors to the Springfield facility enter, they pass through a long hallway displaying memorabilia from RCL cruise ships and mementos of organizational milestones such as its introduc-

tion of the first gas turbine-powered cruise ship. A video describes the company’s products today. “In that way,” says Mr. Bogue, “it expresses our brands.”

The Steelcase consultants also introduced a less hierarchical “wave” pattern of workstations offering a more open, almost continuous worksurface to encourage relationship-building and communication. Only occasional tall panels separate employees in places where upper storage units are required. Supervisors were given private workstations to assist in mentoring and to eliminate any impression of hovering over their colleagues.

“The wave layout appeals particularly to younger staff members,” says Mr. Bogue. “They say it offers more visual interest and chances to interact. Supervisors find it helpful because they can quickly see any employee who needs assistance. And all employees seem to agree that it creates a feeling of energy in the workplace.”

To satisfy the need for informal meeting space, the new facility also features a higher than usual proportion of common spaces, particularly non-reserved ones. Large corner team rooms with tall ceilings and abundant natural light can accommo-



The RCL facility features nautical details such as portholes, white metal, dark green glass and curving architecture.



RCL's new facility features formal and informal meeting rooms, highly flexible training environments and a variety of social spaces that serve multiple functions and facilitate interaction between new hires and existing employees.

date up to 50 people for training exercises or spontaneous meetings, but there are also informal conference spaces for small groups and lounge-like areas for other small, quick gatherings. Formal conference rooms are available on a reservation basis, and two technology training rooms can open up for as many as 275 employees at a time.

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■ ■ ■ Russ Bogue

The space also features two casual cafés, a second-floor terrace, lounges and exterior patios. “With so many different generations, we also felt there was a need to build venues for socializing,” says Steelcase applied research consultant Lynn Lantaff. “These spaces serve multiple functions. They encourage impromptu meetings, facilitate interaction between new hires and

existing employees and they give management the opportunity to be more visible in a social setting.”

More than a year after opening, the new call center is still ramping up. Its 300 employees will continue to grow to about 1,000 within a few years. With turnover levels at 25 to 30 percent, however, the new RCL facility is already defying industry-wide turnover that can approach 100 percent.

In July 2007, the facility received the Grand Prize for New Construction at The Buildings Awards.

Mr. Bogue lays much of the credit for the Springfield facility’s enthusiastic reception among employees to the assistance of the Steelcase research team. “Steelcase really understands how people work,” he says. “They brought me the facts about what’s going on out there and they gave me options that helped us use the knowledge they had assembled.”

As a result, Royal Caribbean has solidly met the most important of its goals from the outset. As the Springfield employees look around their effective, efficient and expressive workplace, they know for certain that their employer indeed values them highly.



Consulting Tools | Methods

Steelcase Applied Research Consulting Methodology: Ask/Observe/Experience

Products used:

Steelcase®: Answer® systems furniture, Criterion® seating, Leap® seating, Modular Power, Pathways® Full Height Privacy Wall

Vecta®: Rizzi Arc™ tables, Rocky seating, Exponents casegoods, E-Table™; Werndl Communicator™ and Conference

Metro: Topo™ furniture, Aliso™ lounge

Brayton®: Circa™ lounge, Donavon™ lounge

PolyVision: Walk-and-Talk™

Steelcase Wood: Impact™

Details®: Worktools and Flat Panel Monitor Arm - Pole Mount Double Arm

Additional Credits:

Real Estate Consultant
Cushman and Wakefield, Miami, FL

Tenant Representative
Spangenberg Phillips Architects, Wichita, KS

Project Management
The Weiss Consulting Group, Miami, FL

Information Technology
Cross Systems, Inc., Winter Haven, FL

Real Estate Developer
Workstage, Grand Rapids, Michigan

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