



The Motley Fool



Named for a Shakespearean character and determined to amuse while it informs, The Motley Fool is far from your typical financial services firm. Its new expansion space falls outside the norm as well, disdaining conventional workstations, minimizing boundaries, and putting all furniture on wheels. Employees—they call themselves Fools—are free to roll wherever they can be most productive.

**FINANCIAL/BANKING SERVICES;
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA**

Topics:

*Collaboration
Engagement*

Applications:

*Collaboration
Open Office*

Project Scope:

*112 employees, 32,000
square feet*

Herman Miller Products:

*Ethospace® System
Resolve® System
Caper® Chairs
SAYL® Chairs
Everywhere™ Tables
Meridian® Filing and Storage*

Year Completed:

2011



Caper seating and Everywhere tables furnish a gathering space with a view.

The chiropractor visits Monday and Wednesday, the massage therapist Tuesday and Thursday, the hair stylist once a month, and a personal trainer is on the payroll.

Welcome to The Motley Fool, the renegade of the financial services industry, where employees proudly call themselves Fools, celebrate the company's birthday on April 1, and are trying out a new work style that some might call Foolish.

"Of course, around here, that's a good thing," points out Alex Vidales, a sort-of HR guy whose job description is so fluid that his business card identifies him as the Spirit Guide.

The employees here enjoy cake days, trivia nights, scavenger hunts—even a monthly vacation lottery. One person is picked at random and expected to take two weeks off—pronto—a nice perk considering vacation time is unlimited to begin with.

The dress code is non-existent. The stress is not so bad (considering the pace). And the employee retention?

"Absolutely off the charts," says Vidales.

"MOST AMAZING FLOOR EVER"

With its head count going up, The Motley Fool needed to take over another floor in its Alexandria, Virginia, headquarters, to run what it humbly dubs "the world's greatest investment community." Co-founder Tom Gardner had a simple requirement for the space.

"Our CEO said it had to be the most amazing floor in the history of The Motley Fool," says Vidales, who served as project manager for the expansion.

To meet that charge, Vidales pulled together a team of Fools from different aspects of the company to brainstorm how the new floor should look and work. Broad participation in the discussion led to broad buy-in for the plan it eventually produced.



The Motley Fool extends mobility into this meeting space with easy-to-rearrange Caper chairs and Everywhere tables.

“Flexibility was everyone’s priority,” Vidales says. “We had cubicles in the past, and they worked well enough, but sometimes we felt pigeonholed. We found we were moving our people around all the time, and we wanted to be able to do so even faster.”

Essentially, members of the design team envisioned a space that would deliver the virtues of an open office environment—but even more so.

ANYWHERE AND EVERYWHERE

The Motley Fool went wide open by doing away with panels, partitions, and walls—for that matter, by skipping just about everything associated with conventional workstations.

Instead, employees use mobile Everywhere tables as their work surface. As their name suggests, Everywhere tables are designed to be used everywhere—and that’s just what’s happening. Employees roll them about frequently—to collaborate with colleagues, rejigger departments, or form project teams.

“For the most part, there are no boundaries,” says Mike Miller, regional sales director for American Office of Washington, D.C., the Herman Miller dealer that worked on the project. “Employees just unplug, roll where they want to be, and plug back in.”

Data and power are routed through a grid of trusses and verticals, part of Herman Miller’s Resolve system. Customized to angle at 90 degrees, the trusses lend an industrial look to the space and form a series of 16’ x 16’ work zones. The verticals, meanwhile, give employees a convenient place to plug in no matter where they end up.

Storage needs are modest—the Foolish demographic trends youthful and prefers digital to paper. Those who need hard storage use modified Meridian lateral files customized with casters, so employees can take their storage with them when they move. Many laterals also have cushioned tops, allowing them to double as mobile guest seating.

The seating is SAYL—chosen while still in the prototype stage. Vidales says the planning team was intrigued that designer Yves Béhar took his inspiration from the Golden Gate



SAYL chairs populate a glass-walled meeting room that allows natural light to brighten the interior.

Bridge. Besides, Vidales explains, “when I sat down, there was a marked difference between SAYL and other chairs at its price point.”

The sole nod to boundaries are a few dozen Ethospace mobile whiteboards, typically used to screen employees who are either on an aisle or adjacent to a colleague. Vidales notes they also came in handy on Valentine’s Day, when employees were issued Nerf guns, invited to scrawl a target on the nearest whiteboard, and blast away.

A CASTER CULTURE

Every employee on the new floor gets much the same setup—Everywhere table, Meridian storage, and SAYL chair. That goes for CEO Tom Gardner, too. Casters, of course, are standard issue.

“In a perfect world, everything would be on wheels,” says Vidales, who promptly wonders if perhaps he and his fellow Fools should zip around the office on skateboards.

That may not be happening just yet, but The Motley Fool is coming close, moving people around every few days—here for a new project, there to accommodate some new hires, and somewhere else to snuff out a potential crisis.

“If we think of a better way, we can just change again during lunch tomorrow,” Vidales says. “The flexibility of our space is already being called out as a contributing factor behind the success of some of our biggest projects.”

Photos by Chris Spielmann

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