

Case Study

UNIVERSAL INSURANCE

“Universal realized that if they were going to move into the future, they needed their facility to be as good as their service.”

Alberto Ferrer, Partner,
Sierra Cardona Ferrer

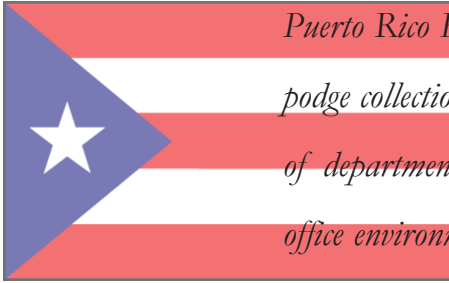


Steelcase

“When we saw that we could manage everything in one stop, it made great sense.”

Luis Miranda Casanas, CEO

Fantastic growth had taken its toll on Universal Insurance's



Puerto Rico Headquarters. The firm was dealing with a hodge-podge collection of furniture, cramped quarters, poor distribution of departments, and an unbearable lack of storage—a typical office environment of a rapidly expanding, successful company.

Growing pains.



Universal Insurance

The largest and fastest growing insurance company in Puerto Rico, specializing in home, auto, and life insurance.



Sierra Cardona Ferrer

This award-winning architectural firm has a resume with an international flavor featuring projects completed in Miami, Aruba, Venezuela, Spain, Argentina and their headquarters in Puerto Rico. Architects Segundo Cardona and José Gutierrez led the structural design of the Universal Insurance building. Architects Alberto Ferrer and Jackie Salterio handled the interior design and space planning.

Objectives

Luis Miranda Casanas, CEO, and Antonio Ortiz, President, knew a new building was needed fast to continue their growth, maintain their reputation for outstanding customer service, and help their employees become more comfortable and effective.

Help was right around the corner. Literally. The architectural firm Sierra Cardona Ferrer was commissioned to design the new headquarters and was located just up the street. Architects Alberto Ferrer and Jackie Salterio worked with Universal executives, department heads and individual employees to identify the following goals for the new space—goals that needed to balance strategic facility management with their employee's needs:

- Provide ample room for today and tomorrow
- Respond to changes over the life of the building inexpensively and quickly
- Create a highly effective environment that helps manage connections between people by improving collaboration and sharing of knowledge
- Support diverse workstyles throughout the building, accommodating knowledge workers to call center employees comfortably and effectively
- Offer inspiring spaces where workers are stimulated, motivated and satisfied

Oh, and there was one other thing. The project needed to be done before the height of hurricane season, just ten months away. This was a critical deadline since during this turbulent weather season Universal Insurance had to be poised to help their customers, rather than being focused on moving. This was a deadline that wasn't going to shift.

“Our culture is driven by efficiency, teamwork and commitment to service. Our old office simply could not support us anymore.” — Luis Miranda Casanas

A radical change in thinking.

Situation

The original floor plan direction called for settings of six and eight conventional cubicles. But Alberto and Jackie knew that the entire environment had to be considered to achieve the project goals.

Working with Steelcase and AFD (the Steelcase dealer), executives from Universal Insurance were exposed to the latest thinking in team and community spaces, homebases, and other aspects of a high performance work environment. The group saw the products up close and learned how, with insightful planning, they could maximize their performance. The idea was to change Universal's office space into an asset, rather than an expense.



The original floorplan was changed to reflect how Universal Insurance employees really worked.

“Because they could actually learn how an office space could help them become more effective and experience the flexibility and comfort of a high-performance work environment, they became completely open to new ideas for their building.”

— Jackie Salterio, Architect

They learned more about the concept of a flexible building infrastructure—the raised floor which provides easy access to modular power and cables, and moveable walls which provide privacy and access to technology. Together, they make changes faster and far less expensive. And because Steelcase's architecture and technology infrastructure products are designed to work seamlessly with its furniture, the whole floorplate became incredibly flexible.

“We weren't looking for a raised floor, but when we saw what a flexible infrastructure could do to liberate our entire space, we realized that this was the right solution for us.” — Luis Miranda Casanas

Reinventing Universal.

Solution

Armed with new knowledge, Universal executives turned their attention inward. They observed and researched how their departments were actually working together, asked what problems needed to be solved within their space and chatted with employees about opportunities for improvement. The idea was no longer to just get a bigger building. Instead, it became an opportunity for the whole company to become more effective.

“It was a very interesting, soul searching process. Universal Insurance looked into everything. It helped their decisions throughout the project, the way they wanted to be perceived and how they provided services,” said Alberto.

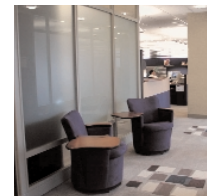


Meeting spaces like this one between departments help foster interaction. Spontaneous ideas can be captured on the Huddleboards that attach to Pathways Conjunction post and beam and left there to share or moved to another area. If seating is needed, people can choose between Brayton's Migrations with tablet arms or laid back L'Attitude seating.

Since flexibility was a key project objective, Pathways Underscore access floor was specified. “It's obvious that you cannot have a highly flexible environment if you don't have a raised floor,” remarked Alberto.

Pathways Architectural Power and Pathways Zone Cabling were housed underneath the floor in all six stories. Since the wiring and cabling in panels and other Steelcase furniture connect directly to the infrastructure, it was simple to make connection points easily accessible to users throughout the floorplate. I-Line Moveable Walls offered space division that looked permanent but could provide a fast, mess-free move in practically no time. Indirect, recessed and accent lighting obtained through Steelcase's alliance with Lightolier helped energize the space.

Once the modular infrastructure freed the design team from power and data access constraints, they were able to focus on user needs. More team spaces were created where employees could collaborate and share knowledge. Departments that worked together were placed near each other to better manage the critical interactions between people. Even the spaces in between were designed to help facilitate the exchange of information among individuals and teams.



Even aisleways can turn into spaces for informal exchanges. Here, Migration seating with tablet arms provide a space for a quick work session. I-Line Moveable Walls provide privacy for the nearby team space.

“There are challenges on every job, but I would rate the planning and installation process of this project a 9½ to 10. The whole group just did a fantastic job.” — Alberto Ferrer

Solutions continued

“We needed to give Universal not only the architectural expression that people see on the outside of the building, but also an interior that was sensible, logical and effective,” remarked Alberto. “Customers need to perceive the firm as smart, stable and caring and not that their premiums are going towards unnecessary luxuries. Instead, the luxury of the space would be in its logic and organization rather than high end finishes everywhere.”

Process makes perfect.

With a deadline looming, it was essential that the project ran smoothly. To ensure that it did, a planning team was assembled consisting of an electrical engineer, an IT consultant, and Steelcase dealer interior project manager and product specialists. Together with Universal CFO Luis Perez, Project Manager Eduardo Miranda and the architects, the team provided a consistent point of contact from strategy through installation.

“Having a cross-functional team gave us a great sense of reassurance and simplified everything,” said Alberto. “We were able to see the project through many different eyes and maximize the efficiency of the project.”

The team met regularly to:

- Facilitate quick decision making
- Respond to changes during the project
- Ensure no details were missing
- Maintain consistency from planning through execution

The team had to move fast to ensure a move-in before peak hurricane season. Installation needed to run smoothly—something often easier said than done. But unlike typical construction schedules that run tasks sequentially, the Steelcase manufacturing and installation process allows for a faster, more parallel plan. Modular components manufactured off-site and delivered ready for installation make for much quicker execution. And since Steelcase is in direct control of more aspects of installation, coordination of various tradespeople is simpler, reliable and more efficient.



Brayton's L'Attitude seating provides a comfortable conversation spot right outside a meeting room framed in glass I-Line Moveable Walls.

Task Name	Start	Finish	May	June	July	August	Sept
1 Lighting	Mon 5/20/02	Thu 5/30/02					
2 Power	Fri 5/31/02	Wed 7/3/02					
3 Access Floor	Mon 6/3/02	Tue 7/16/02					
4 Zone Cabling	Mon 6/17/02	Thu 7/25/02					
5 Carpet	Thu 6/20/02	Wed 7/31/02					
6 I-Line	Tue 7/9/02	Mon 9/2/02					
7 Furniture	Wed 6/26/02	Mon 9/2/02					

Ready-to-install products and efficient planning made meeting the tight deadline possible.

Behind the Scenes: Installation Timeline



1 The ceiling grid and lighting were installed.

Components were designed and manufactured off site and delivered ready for installation.



2



3 Pathways Architectural Power was placed first.

Followed by Pathways Underscore raised access floor.



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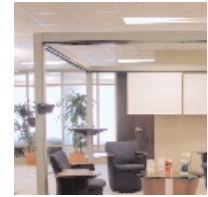
Success.

Results

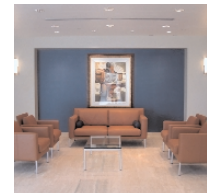
Much to the delight of Universal Insurance executives Luis and Antonio, the move-in was on schedule and before the weather turned sour. Employees pitched in during a weekend move that made everyone tired, but excited. "It was incredible. Everybody helped and was gung-ho, from top management through all employees," said Alberto.



This collection of Answer homebases is arranged in front of a broad set of windows that let refreshing light in throughout the day. The combination of variety of panel heights, panel mounted screens and Activity mobile screens help occupants better control their level of privacy and availability. The mobile screens have a markerboard surface, perfect for spontaneous thoughts, reminders or just to explain an idea better. Player chairs provide guests comfortable seating.

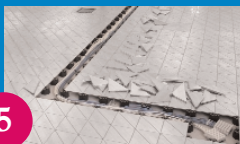


Open, airy meeting spaces like this one framed with Pathways Conjunction post and beam facilitate teaming and the exchange of ideas. Huddleboards provide an erasable writing surface to capture thoughts and display messages.



This lounge area uses Brayton's Sidewalk lounge seating to provide a clean, comfortable aesthetic. Lightolier recessed lighting and sconces support the relaxed atmosphere.

Pathways Zone Cabling was then laid throughout the floorplate.



5



Carpet tiles applied next.

6

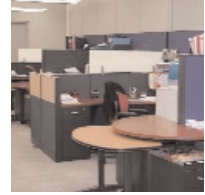
Power and cabling were plugged into I-Line Moveable walls and Answer panels - no hard wiring needed.



7

Results *continued*

Today, Universal Insurance is an example of the leading edge in building and interior construction and the company is poised for continued growth. Their new building uniquely balances user needs with the ability to manage their facility more strategically. They invested in their employees, choosing products that provide comfort, respond to change, balance privacy and support diverse workstyles. And, of course, they beat out Mother Nature by moving in on time, ready to serve their customers.



The people residing in these workspaces can free up desk space by moving worktools off the desk and onto the Answer Slatwall skin. Shelves provide space for personal effects and often-used paperwork. Answer's mobile pedestals help make files transportable while the nested mobile tables can be used to expand worksurface area or to provide workspace when teaming with colleagues.



People in this area can move from focused, individual work to collaboration in a snap. Pathways Hub Tables punctuate the aisleway, delivering power and data access and providing the perfect docking station for Relevant mobile tables. Leap chairs provide high performance seating throughout the space.

“Steelcase was committed to do whatever was needed to get the job done right, including handling all of our changes throughout the process. They knew their stuff. We’re really happy with the results.” – Edgar Hernandez, Vice President, Retention and Acquisition

Steelcase products used:

Answer® systems furniture
Pathways® Conjunction
Pathways® Underscore
Pathways® Architectural Power
Pathways® Zone Cabling
I-Line Moveable Walls
Steelcase utility lights
DesignTex®
Leap® Chair
Mingle™ Chair
Activity™ Products (mobile screens, personal tables)
Elective Elements®
Relevant®
Broadmoor®
Monarch™ desking
200 Series Laterals
Storage Cabinets
Brayton® (Switch™, LaCosta®, Sidewalk™, Footnote™, Migrations®, Diekman, L'Attitude™, Ginger™)
Vecta® (Reunion™, Kart®, Ballet®, Cafe, Assisa)
Details (Keyboards, Worktools, Desk Mats, Pelican Drawers, SlatWall)
Stow Davis® (custom boardroom tables, conference tables, custom reception desks)
Lightolier®

Credits

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