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COMPUGEN CONFIGURES ITS OWN HQ'S IDENTITY

One of Canada's largest privately owned and operated IT services providers uses its handsome new headquarters to demonstrate its expertise in assembling component technologies into powerful, integrated systems

BY PAMELA YOUNG

Compugen's president, CEO and founder Harry Zarek is adept at explaining to non-techies what the company he has run for 30 years does. "We provide what is called IT infrastructure," he says. "That's the underlying technology that supports a customer's business. It includes the computer systems, the networks, the servers and storage, and it also includes what we call the common underlying applications: e-mail, security, remote communications, the ability to communicate and collaborate, the ability to do presentations, and the ability to analyze information about their own business or about their customers." Working with Cisco Systems, Intel, Microsoft, BlackBerry and dozens of other ven-

The bright, open-plan interiors encourage collaboration and provide the flexibility that an entrepreneurial company needs

dors, Compugen configures all the component technologies into a system that meets the customer's needs.

"Everything we do here utilizes all of the technologies we sell," Mr. Zarek says of the company's new headquarters in Richmond Hill, ON. For example, the keychain fob that provides employees access through the facility's security portals is also integral to a 'managed print' system. Like the rest of us, Compugen's employees initiate the command to print with a computer keystroke. The document won't actually print, however, until the individual swipes his or her fob at a printing station. The system keeps track of how many pages each person prints, and confidential documents aren't left sitting at a printer. As well, the 'print' command expires overnight, which cuts down on what actually gets printed. Huge amounts of paper are saved, and fewer printing stations are required – as Compugen demonstrated when it moved into its new building last fall and switched over to this system. "We had almost 90 printers in our old office," Mr. Zarek says. "We now have eight

printers for our entire facility."

Compugen had outgrown the leased building that had previously served as its headquarters, and the company decided to build its own new flagship facility. Urbacon handled the design/build of the new structure, which has 75,000 square feet of office space distributed over three floors, with a 45,000-sq.-ft. warehouse attached to it. Compugen now occupies the first two office floors and plans to let out the third on a short-term lease; eventually it expects to grow into that space as well.

The company turned to figure3 for the interior design, in part because the firm has demonstrated its expertise in creating open-plan workplaces that are comfortable and attractive,



Graphics and three-dimensional design elements throughout the office allude to circuitry and computers. Punch-card patterns inspired the lobby's screen; aluminum cooling blocks from desktop computers add texture to the front of the reception desk.



Above: The cafeteria lunchroom accommodate meetings that range from casual encounters to formal presentations. **Right:** A demountable glazed wall screened with computer imagery physically separates the call centre from the rest of technical services but lets light through.



and yet make very efficient use of space. High-walled cubicles had been the norm at Compugen's previous head office, but now company was seeking a more collaborative environment. "The technologies are getting more complex and customer needs are more complex," Mr. Zarek says. "Our people have to work as teams."

Many of the people who comprise these teams do some of their work from home or from other remote locations. "Part of the concept of this building was to give people the opportunity to work from home or work flexible hours," says Johanna Delroy, Compugen's national director of marketing. Mr. Zarek adds: "What I say to folks generally is, 'If you need to think and you need to work on something uninterrupted, you don't need to be here. If you need to met and talk to people and get updates, then face-to-face makes a lot of sense'."

The interior design of Compugen's headquarters combines the flexibility that an entrepreneurial company needs with open-plan work zones and attractive common areas that foster collaboration and interdepartmental communication. "We're at about 130 square feet per person, so it's actually quite dense, but it's interesting how open it feels," says figure3 managing partner Allan Guinan. "The workstations are low; the aisles are quite wide." No one has a private office, not even Mr. Zarek. And where interior walls are necessary – as for example, between the call centre and the rest of the technical services department – they are demountable for ease of re-configuration and glazed to ensure that staff have ample access to natural light. For Compugen, increasing the number and size range of meeting rooms and adding some informal meeting rooms to the mix eased the transition to a more open plan.

Lee Perry, Compugen's project manager of technical services, says that the new cafeteria and lunchroom area is a much more popular gathering place than its predecessor: "The old one was a third the size of this one, and it had industrial green paint and purple chairs – nothing matched. Now we have comfortable chairs around the perimeter. People come in with their laptops and hold small meetings. Our informal lunchroom is also used for large meetings; we can show presenta-

tions on the [wall-mounted flat screen] monitors."

Animating this spare, bright and clean-looking facility are bold graphics and three-dimensional design elements alluding to circuitry and computers. An inlaid grid of aluminum cooling blocks from desktop computers adds texture to the reception desk, and punch-card-inspired custom graphics enliven the cafeteria and lunchroom.

Although Compugen moved into its new headquarters last fall, it is still in some ways a work in progress. A lighting control system will soon be installed that will allow for the individual dimming of each ballast, and this energy-saving measure will work in tandem with automated blinds that are already in place. Some workstations are already used on a temporary, unassigned basis, both by visiting vendors and Compugen's own people, and Mr. Zarek wants to move more of the office to this 'free address' model; he sees this means of using real estate more efficiently as a natural fit with the telework policies the company has already adopted. Ms. Delroy says that there was some staff resistance at first when Compugen moved into a more open workplace, but she estimates that 90 per cent of the company's employees are now really happy with the environment. Mr. Zarek has decided that as leases come up for renewal at the company's other 13 offices across Canada, the branches will move into space that more closely resembles the open-plan head office. He says it's proving to be an easy sell: "When people come here and they see how clean and neat and organized it is, they want it." | CFM&D

INTERIOR DESIGN SUPPLIERS - Interior Design: figure3; **Systems Furniture, Demountable Walls and Meeting Tables:** Teknion; **Task Seating:** Allsteel; **Meeting Room Seating:** Allseating; **Lounge Seating:** Global, Teknion; **Carpet:** Shaw Commercial; **Metal Screen:** Unit 5; **Graphics:** Schawk; **Operable Wall:** Moderco; **Porcelain Floor Tile:** Stone Tile, Olympia Tile; **Linoleum Floor:** Forbo; **Epoxy Flooring:** Niagara Protective Coatings; **Solid Surfacing:** Caesarstone; **Washroom Marble Vanity:** Crystal Tile and Marble