

Informative Graphics Makes Furniture Data More Accessible

When senior management issued mandates to reduce product development cycle time, Steelcase turned to Informative Graphics solutions to address those requirements.

Laura Carrabine

Steelcase (Grand Rapids, MI; [website](#)) helps individuals and organizations around the world work more effectively by offering innovative furniture systems and other office-related products such as lighting, storage, flooring, and information display appliances to create work environments that integrate architecture, furniture, and technology.

Steelcase senior business consultant Richard Scott and his team help coordinate and support the company's development engineering group. Their efforts impact all Steelcase locations in North America, including Canada and Mexico, and in some cases, they assist international locations as well.

He says the design and development of office furniture is complex. "Designers have to take into account not just the design, but also the colors, fabrics, textures, and wood grains," says Scott. "There is a tremendous amount of input associated with just one design. The data presents some interesting challenges."

Nearly one decade ago, Steelcase partnered with Informative Graphics (Phoenix, AZ) when it purchased one license of Myriad, which allows users to safely and securely view and share the content in all project files. It is used in engineering, design, manufacturing and construction environments to enable team members to view and markup all project files, including 3D and 2D CAD drawings, graphic files and documents, without requiring access to the native software.

Steelcase also began using *Pro/Engineer* CAD software and product data management (PDM) software from Co-Create called Work Manager. Scott realized that many of the Co-Create people were using Myriad. "As we examined Myriad alongside Work Manager," Scott explains, "we learned that Myriad was integral to our design and the ability to mark up drawings, to mark up engineering specifications for the development project, and to electronically speed up processes. Myriad seemed to be the best product at that time and it's been working great all these years."

Today, the company retains 85 Myriad 6.0 licenses. According to Scott, "We were able to embed Myriad into our ability to read and document engineering change requests and marked-up drawings into our change request cycle." Scott says Myriad is the solution best suited for Steelcase's design, production, and supplier network.

As a mandate, Myriad is part of every single Steelcase design that is released into production. "Every design from our development engineering group contains a Myriad viewable file that contains drawings, engineering specifications, test results, and other essential files," Scott says. "We can view all of it using Myriad. No project gets started or finished without the use of Myriad. No product gets released into product development as a release design unless it has Myriad capabilities or files that can be viewed by Myriad and it's in our PDM vault. We formalized that whole development effort."

Recently, Steelcase partnered with Informative Graphics again. Other groups within the company, such as sales, marketing, purchasing, and documentation, that require new product information are using Informative Graphics' Net-It Central with the CAD option (formerly DrawBridge Central) software. As new products are released from new product development, the Myriad-based data is released out of engineering into Net-It Central, a Web-based publishing and collaboration software for drawings and documents. The product information is readily accessible to a range of Steelcase organizations that require the data.

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Information to the Masses

Steelcase is tying its suppliers much more tightly to its manufacturing capabilities. To do so, Steelcase recently purchased a second server to service their suppliers using Net-It Central. Now a Steelcase supplier that needs access to a DWG drawing of a new part, for instance, can access the Net-It Central file via a user name and password and download the file to a client as a DWG file. "The beauty of the Web-based system is its immediate enterprise-wide access for both Steelcase's organization and its suppliers," says Scott.

He notes that the Web-based technology is key for engineers and designers to be able to access and read product design data. "That's why we are involved with Informative Graphics. Their software allows our organization to be much more flexible and reach out to our enterprise as well as to our suppliers. When we make changes to an existing product, it is essential that our suppliers associated with that product have the ability to quickly access the change information to eliminate errors and scrap. Having the right, most recent revisions available to suppliers means that we reduce the risk of receiving the wrong equipment because the supplier didn't have the most updated part or product information for manufacturing."

"Net-It Central provides our Internet capability within a Web-based environment just as we had with Myriad in a viewer/markup situation. Net-It Central also gives us the ability to extend our extranet to qualified suppliers to get them on board so they can actually become part of our internal development supply network."

Scott and his team have strategically selected this working environment to speed cycle times and to protect design integrity. For new products, the Web-based PDM system speeds the product qualification process and supply side of the business. For work associated with existing products, the Net-It Central-based PDM solution is predicted to provide a tremendous cost-savings. "With the ability to drive product design and production via the Internet, we will be able to speed time-to-market and reduce errors," Scott says. "In the past, by the time suppliers got change order information, the product was already in production. Steelcase absorbed the costs associated with the production of a wrong product regardless of how or why it happened."

Measurable Results

Scott says Steelcase's initial implementation of Myriad within the engineering group has had a significant impact on how his team develops new products and effectively communicates its information throughout the engineering environment. "Prior to using Myriad, we didn't have the capability to query items online interactively. For many of our product components, it was easier to retool a new part than to go back and review product design documents. We know that using Myriad has helped with some tremendous cost savings in just making our designs more efficient for manufacturing."

With Net-It Central, Steelcase is anticipating identical benefits across the board with internal company organizations, as well as with suppliers. Scott says, "We believe that our Net-It Central network will help suppliers become much more savvy in terms of accessing our product data and acting on the most up-to-date information. This will allow them to move to manufacturing and shipping much more quickly. This is a win-win situation for Steelcase and its suppliers."

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Learning Curve

Scott says the Myriad integration was second nature. The company developed classes for the new PDM process and embedded the use of Myriad into the same classes. Today, several thousand Steelcase workers and suppliers are Myriad literate. "There was no choice in the matter of learning how to use Myriad," notes Scott. "Anyone who wanted access to an application needed an account to log into. Before they were able to do that, they were required to undertake training. It was a very successful process given the size and scope of the training effort."

Regarding the implementation of Net-It Central, Scott says, "With the advent of publishing on the Web, Net-It Central is making our application development time much shorter just because of the nature of the development environment. The technology is easy to learn and use. Ever since senior management issued mandates to reduce product development cycle time, we found that the use of Informative Graphics solutions have helped us address those requirements. In terms of Internet-based development and manufacturing, the use of Net-It Central is helping us continue to make design and production breakthroughs and share them within the company and with suppliers. It's an essential tool in remaining successful."

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