

Fun with Mozilla Firefox

Technology Icon Expands Worldwide

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Our work with Mozilla, the Mountain View, California-based technology organization best known for its Firefox web browser used by 450 million people worldwide, began in early 2011 with a highly unusual but pleasurable phone call from Mozilla CFO James Cook.



“Are you ready to have some fun?” he casually asked, explaining that the company planned to expand in North America and globally to tap into areas with high concentrations of “Mozillians,” the hearty band of open source developers who write the code for the popular web browser.

He was very specific about the features required in the new locations: Cities influential in Web development with excellent artistic and cultural communities. Moreover, the non-profit parent organization “dedicated to keeping the power of the Web in people’s hands,” would only be interested in bicycle-friendly facilities close to transportation, restaurants, and entertainment venues.

That seemed like a tall order but very much in keeping with the roots and growth of an organization that has more than 400,000 community contributors worldwide who contribute approximately 40 percent of the code to its Internet products. The new office locations would be especially important as gathering points for Mozilla’s volunteer base.

To achieve their expansion plans, we worked with Mozilla executives on site selection and to formulate a strategic global rollout plan, as well as the creation of an internal real estate and facilities department to decide which aspects of the expansion should be done in-house or outsourced.

Office with a View

Our firm began the first phase of the expansion by searching for office space in San Francisco, where Mozilla could tap into its contributor base and take advantage of the city's highly educated pool of technology talent to staff the office. We quickly identified Hills Brother Plaza, the renovated historic coffee roasting facility, along the Embarcadero waterfront, as the ideal location.

The rooftop deck, in particular, would be the perfect space for its employees and volunteers to gather, but city codes and fire regulations seemed daunting and, at times, impossible to satisfy. Nonetheless, we worked hard behind the scenes with the city planning department and mayor's office to meet their requirements, and we gained approval to create a deck that had world-class views of San Francisco Bay. Although Mozilla signed a lease for the space within a month, our job was far from over for this location.

Our next challenge was to establish a bicycle program for Mozilla's San Francisco employees that allowed them to ride throughout the downtown area or take bikes on the train to its Mountain View headquarters. So our real estate firm initiated and helped create a bike-sharing program that featured regular and folding bicycles painted orange, plus helmets, locks, and safety lights—all emblazoned with the Firefox logo—that today can be seen throughout the entire Bay Area.

Going Global

With the San Francisco expansion complete, Mozilla turned its attention to London. We introduced Jim Cook to Martin Levy, Managing Director of London-based ITRA Global / Martin Levy Commercial. Multiple executives working over nine time zones, plus the challenge of finding the right location in a huge metropolitan area like London were all part of the experience. With Martin's hard work, ITRA Global identified a great location on St. Martin's Lane in Covent Garden that has since become a highly popular gathering place for Mozilla's contributors in the United Kingdom, especially during the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the 2012 Summer Olympics.

Back again to North America, we worked with Debra L. Stevens of Boston-based ITRA Global / The Stevens

Group who moved quickly to find a great location for Mozilla in the Innovation District of Boston. Next we headed back across the Atlantic to Paris, where Charles Tatham of ITRA Global / Tatham Property Solutions worked tirelessly with us to first obtain temporary, and then permanent, office space that Mozilla will occupy in Q1 2013 in the Montmartre section of the city.

These Paris transactions, along with another we completed for Mozilla in Berlin, proved to be very challenging due to French and German laws governing real estate. Each country has different business practices and regulations, and understanding these nuances is critical to completing transactions successfully. To make matters even more interesting, we also initiated and conducted negotiations with government agencies in Paris and Berlin for economic incentives that will benefit Mozilla as well as the governments of both those two cities.

We also worked with Mozilla on lease renewals in Vancouver and Toronto in Canada and in Auckland, New Zealand. Our most recent assignment for Mozilla is Portland, Oregon, where we've been working with ITRA Global / Hume Meyers Tenant Counsel to obtain various incentives from the city and locate exciting and creative space in the heart of the Pearl District. Unbelievably, Mozilla also recently signed a lease for an additional two floors at Hills Brothers Plaza in San Francisco, more than doubling its existing space in the building.

Conclusion

Throughout our journey of finding the perfect office locations around the world for Mozilla, we unquestionably had fun but, more importantly, witnessed the intricacies of the global marketplace and how interconnected cultures are in today's world. That's why it is critically important for any company seeking to relocate or expand outside of their native country to find conflict-free corporate real estate representation with local affiliates who can identify business and cultural differences that can make or break the transaction.

This article appeared in the Fall 2012 Issue of ITRA Global's Newsletter, Corporate Real Estate Strategies.