

## WORKING CONDITIONS: The inn thing for office space

### Auditor assigns desk for a day, hotel style, in Detroit

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When 550 employees of **PricewaterhouseCoopers** move into their new office building near Ford Field Monday morning, they'll find desktops all spanking clean. But unlike almost all other companies, those desktops are likely to stay that way.

PwC, as the company calls itself, has built its new home, and its entire business practice, around a concept called hoteling, in which many employees don't have assigned desks, cubicles or offices.

Instead, workers like Stasi Brown, an auditor who spends most of her workday visiting clients, check in when they visit the main PwC office much like guests at a hotel. They get assigned a desk for a day, and when they leave, the housekeeping staff tidies up for the next guest.

Brown, 36, says she much prefers finding an uncluttered desktop instead of the more traditional workspace festooned with sticky notes, potted plants, photographs and piles of paper.

"I like having the cleared-desk concept," she says.

The Royal Oak mother of three keeps her children's photos in her wallet, and otherwise doesn't miss all the junk that comes with a permanently assigned desk. "I guess to me it's just extra things I don't need," she says.

For service firms like PwC, the growing trend in hoteling is simply good economics. Despite having 550 staffers assigned to its new building, the firm has room for at most about 400 desks. But that's enough, since hoteling assumes a good portion of its workforce won't be there on any given day.

In the few years that PwC has evolved hoteling at its old offices in the Renaissance Center, says managing director Mark Mendola, "We've never, ever had a situation when we were all checked in at the hotel."

Naturally enough, when PwC first introduced hoteling a few years ago, most employees hated the idea. But all that turned around as people got used to the idea and saw the benefits. "Everyone has bought into it," Mendola says.

As with most hotels, some guests get fancier digs than others. Arriving at PwC, staffers check in at an electronic kiosk, which, based on an employee's rank and responsibility, offers a series of available workstations. High-ranking workers can choose among available private offices; those lower down pick a cubicle for a day.

Brown and other staffers keep the same phone extension wherever they go, and calls are routed automatically to their temporary desks. Often a laptop and some portable files are all that's needed to set up for the day. In some cases, if employees reserve in advance, the hoteling staff can arrange to have family photos or important files on the desk before the employee arrives.



At the boardroom of PricewaterhouseCoopers' Detroit office, design manager Todd Heiser from Environments Group of Chicago talks with senior manager Kathy King on Thursday. The firm did the interior layout for the auditing company. (Photos by HUGH GRANNUM/Detroit Free Press)

Mary Reinbold, a PwC staffer who's overseeing the move into the new building, says the firm occasionally has trouble with so called squatters, or staffers who don't want to leave a given workstation. So the computerized system forces everyone to reregister after three days. In some cases, an administrative aide needs to pay a visit to remind squatters that it's time to move out.

When PwC decided to move from the RenCen into the new St. Antoine Building near Ford Field, it seized the opportunity to take hoteling to the next level. The firm created mini-kitchens and supply rooms throughout its building so that each neighborhood, or cluster of workstations, has one nearby. The firm also installed conference rooms large and small, some of which require reservations in advance, while others are available for impromptu meetings.

Designers also did away with the old partners' row of private offices with nice window views; instead, perimeter space near windows is left open for staff workstations, which allows more natural light to pour in.

"The space was designed to support the business, not to support a sense of entitlement," says Kathy King, a manager with Chicago-based **Environments Group**, which did the interior layout for PwC.

The five-story, 115,000-square-foot St. Antoine Building, located immediately east of Ford Field, is a joint venture between **Etkin Equities**, a Southfield real estate firm, and **DLI Properties**, an arm of the Detroit Lions organization. PwC will occupy the first four floors; the fifth floor remains available for lease.

Tom Lewand, executive vice president of the Detroit Lions organization, says the PwC arrival will help support the creation of sandwich shops and other retail ventures in the stadium complex.

"We're excited about the energy, we're excited about the quality of the tenant, and we're looking forward to having the new neighbors," Lewand said.

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