

The Globe and Mail
national daily newspaper
Toronto, ON
August 30, 2011

Property Report

ROI Capital Ltd.
RECENT FINANCING
\$30 million
Hotel 550 Wellington LP



▲ **7.3%**

Biggest one-week REIT gainer: Dundee » CIBC

▼ **18.6%**

Biggest one-week REIT decliner: Lanesborough » CIBC

▼ **12.6%**

U.S. office vacancy rate at mid-year 2011, down from 13.6% a year earlier » Avison Young

\$37

Average asking rent for downtown space in the U.S. at mid-year 2011 » Avison Young

DEVELOPMENT

Brand-building, one girder at a time

As companies rethink their headquarters, they are infusing them with brand messaging – and having some fun in the process

CHRIS ATCHISON

In the business districts of Canada's major cities, towering arches and Corinthian columns stand as reminders of the way we used to design marquee office buildings.

Much has changed since. When Scott Dyer and his colleagues at Corus Entertainment Inc. began planning a new corporate headquarters eight years ago, their design principles were a stark departure from those of yesteryear.

"The design of the building had to focus on principles like fun, transparency, green thinking. It had to reinforce our various Corus brands, and we wanted it to be colourful," says Mr. Dyer, the chief technology officer and executive vice-president of shared services for Corus, a Toronto-based media company.

The result: Corus Quay, an eight-storey, 460,000-square-foot office complex on Toronto's waterfront. The glass-and-steel building, which was designed by Diamond + Schmitt Architects, provided Corus with an anchor location and allowed it to consolidate nearly a dozen offices and 1,150 employees from around the Greater Toronto Area under the same roof.

It also allowed Corus to make a significant statement about its playful yet growth-oriented corporate identity.

As companies across Canada upgrade their offices or build new towers to suit their needs, occupying a structure that reinforces their brand messaging has become a prime concern.

For its new Telus House tower in Toronto, the Vancouver-based telecom provider wasn't just intending to make a strong statement about its presence in Canada's largest city. It also aimed to incorporate open, collaboration-friendly spaces for its employees.

Like Corus Quay, Telus House provided an opportunity to consolidate offices and stake a claim to real estate in an up-and-coming area of the city – in this case, next to the Air Canada Centre on formerly derelict land.

Creating a positive internal environment – including low-walled, open-concept seating, plenty of natural light, living room-like meeting spaces and amenities such as a fitness room and a wellness centre with massage and physiotherapy services – was a central concern, says



The lively new headquarters of Corus Entertainment lies next to Sugar Beach on Toronto's waterfront. Below, the city's new Telus House aims to make a green impression. SARAH DEA/THE GLOBE AND MAIL



FRED LUM/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Andrea Goertz, Telus' senior vice-president of strategic initiatives.

So, too, was respecting the outside environment.

Why? Telus' advertising is defined by cute animals, conveying the idea that the company is focused on the environment.

"We wanted to take environmental and sustainability messaging to heart in the design," says Ms. Goertz. "When it came to looking at features and materials, the brand was the all-encompassing platform we used to measure everything against."

The tower, designed by Adamson Associates Architects, has a green roof, a lighting management system to reduce power use, a storm-water management system and formaldehyde-free furniture. Thus far, the building's interior has achieved gold certification in the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program, with the entire building's LEED status still pending.

Sustainable design is at the top of many image-conscious employers' wish lists, says Dia-

“

When it came to looking at features and materials, the brand was the all-encompassing platform we used to measure everything against.

Andrea Goertz
Senior vice-president of strategic initiatives, Telus Corp.

mond + Schmitt principal Jack Diamond. "They want the marketing prestige of saying we have a LEED-certified building."

A green approach to doing business and providing a comfortable, sustainable environment for employees can boost a company's brand, says Dann Ilicic, founder of Vancouver-based consulting firm Wow Branding.

"It depends on the industry, but when corporations define their brand by something like their respect for the environment, it can really help attract employees and

drive results," Mr. Ilicic says.

But environmental friendliness, a sleek exterior and employee-friendly features aren't the only considerations for companies looking to make a statement.

In the case of global professional services firm PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, which will occupy 16 floors of a new KPMB Architects-designed tower at 18 York Street in Toronto in the coming weeks, the firm wanted to be in a burgeoning area of the downtown core.

Proximity to clients was important, but the central location was also key to attracting and retaining top talent, says David Forster, PwC managing partner for the Greater Toronto Area.

Many of those coveted employees are young professionals who want to work close to their downtown condos, with amenities such as restaurants and entertainment venues nearby to ensure ample after-work options.

"About 80 per cent of our people ride their bikes or take transit to work, and our location near the GO Train and subway offered them an easier commute," he says. "I think because of our location, people are going to enjoy their workday that much more and we'll have a happier group of people, which will produce more value for the firm and clients."

For Corus, whose corporate portfolio includes television and radio stations such as W Network, YTV, 680 News and children's programming producer Nelvana Ltd., its new home also had to reflect its creativity. How? One way was to add a few novel elements.

The most notable is a much-touted (and well-used) three-storey corkscrew slide leading from an elevated employee seating area down to the main floor in the grand atrium.

Mr. Dyer says the company's efforts to design a brand-friendly space have already begun delivering benefits.

"We've actually had people request employment information because they visited and want to work here," Mr. Dyer says. "The other thing we've seen is less staff turnover since we moved into this space. There are a lot of reasons related to the economy and other things, but I do feel there is a connection to the happiness and joy people feel coming to this building."

Special to The Globe and Mail