

a customer story

professional services

Tower Pinkster makes it real.



Tower Pinkster Titus Associates, Inc.
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Credits:

Tower Pinkster Titus Associates, Inc.
Custer Workplace Interiors

“A client comes to us with a vision,” says Arnold Mikon, FAIA, president and CEO of Tower Pinkster Titus Associates, a 50-person architecture and engineering firm headquartered in Kalamazoo, MI. “For example, she’ll say, ‘I want to teach high school students more effectively, yet I have these facilities restraints.’ That client has a vision for what she wants to accomplish, and our product is making that vision real.”

Tower Pinkster recently brought to life a very impressive vision, this time for their own business: a dramatic new workplace that designs collaboration and teamwork into the office environment, and will be the first project in town to be LEED certified.

Their old workspace left much to be desired. The firm was spread over three floors of two different buildings. “Our offices were not inspiring, and they didn’t support teamwork,” says Stephen Loney, director of operations. “It was easier to send someone an email than to get up and see them in person.”

When a second floor space became available in the heart of Kalamazoo’s revitalized downtown, and a prospective tenant needed Tower Pinkster’s existing space in a hurry, the project went fast track. The firm teamed with Custer Workplace Interiors and Steelcase to create the interiors of the 12,000 sq. ft. space and install the firm in their new home in less than three months.

“We were unanimous in selecting Steelcase because of their aesthetics, price, and technology capability. Steelcase was first by a long shot,” says Mikon. “We also had the most confidence in them delivering against a very short timeline.”

Jane Minich, the Custer project designer who helped Tower Pinkster with the furniture floor plan, says “in their new space they were moving to a single floor and they wanted a cohesive look, with an open, more collaborative place to work.”

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■ ■ ■ Arnold Mikon, FAIA
President & CEO
Tower Pinkster

To support a collaborative work style, Answer and Kick systems furniture were blended together to create three different workstation typicals, in sizes ranging from 6' X 6' to 8' X 11'.



“We see people all the time now – visitors, clients, vendors, everyone – who walk up to something and touch it. A fabric, some furniture, a surface. Or they stare at part of the space, admiring it. They get a smile on their face, or they slowly nod. You know what they’re thinking. They’re impressed.”

Steve Loney,
Director of Operations
Tower Pinkster



All workstations have large expanses of work-surface, ideal for working with 30" x 42" sets of drawings that when open lay 7 feet wide, and work that requires frequent side by side collaboration. Workstations have mobile peds with cushion tops to offer a convenient perch for collaborators, and a mix of panel heights that encourages communication.

There are just a handful of private offices, for human resources, accounting, and three of the firm’s executives. Mikon’s corner office looks and feels more like a conference room than a CEO’s office. A 60" round table and four Uno chairs take center stage. “They talked about my having wood furniture in here, but this is how I work, and it’s more inviting for people,” says Mikon. A 24-inch deep worksurface runs along one wall, turns and runs half way along an adjacent wall, to provide his personal work-space. A Leap task chair – the firm’s choice for seating – completes his office.

Although the Tower Pinkster space feels open and spacious, there’s no room to waste. “None of the walls are plumb, and we didn’t have extra space to eat up with in-feed,” says Minich. “We had to handle plenty of technology, yet provide a very clean look, so we used a multipurpose modular power in-feed.” This approach, along with Answer’s horizontal and vertical lay-in cabling, speeds installation and reconfiguration.

Mikon says the technology that’s surprised him is the PolyVision Walk-and-Talk Interactive Whiteboard. “We figured we’d use it to improve communication with our Grand Rapids office 50 miles away. I’d been pushing for video conferencing but I thought the Walk-and-Talk offered more flexibility, and it cost a little less than video conferencing.”

In less than three months
Steelcase and Custer Work-
place Interiors created,
installed, and moved
Tower Pinkster into their
new 12,000 sq. ft. home

Walk-and-Talk lets users present, interact with and capture information, saves and prints data, and even allows interaction with projected images with its touch-sensitive surface.

“What we’ve found is that we’re using it with clients. We had a major client in here and used the Walk-and-Talk to present the plans for a new building. With a traditional

projected presentation, one person tends to control things and the other people become observers. With the Walk-and-Talk, everyone felt comfortable going up to the board, making marks, writing comments. Since the Walk-and-Talk is digitized everyone left the meeting with copies of the revisions.

“We even use the Walk-and-Talk in presentations to help us win business. It’s another way to demonstrate innovation to our clients.”

Another innovative aspect of the space is its sustainability, beginning with the daylight streaming into the space from a skylight that runs the length of the roof peak, and an abundance of windows. “Probably 80% or more of the people have a direct view out of a window from where they sit, and everyone has a view when standing,” says Loney. Fluorescent light fixtures are switched off by photo cells when there’s enough natural light in the space.

Other sustainable strategies include low VOC paints and carpeting, GREENGUARD Certified products such as Leap seating, and bamboo or cork floor coverings (both environmentally sound materials) in some areas. Though the initial cost for these products was higher, Loney estimates the overall cost difference for the project at less than 10%. He says the additional cost was never an issue: “It’s just the right thing to do.”

Collaborative and meeting spaces include a large board/presentation room, a smaller conference room next door with the Walk-and-Talk, and a room adjacent to the lobby for quick meetings with visitors at a stand-up height table and stools. This room features a curving wall made of wood slats that allows some privacy without cutting off the participants from the ebb and flow of activity at the firm.

Another design approach abets collaboration: a group of three Kick workstations in a 120-degree configuration. Designed for interns, they're also being used by Tower Pinkster staffers visiting from the firm's other office. The workstations have large worksurfaces and are close by other workstations, making it easy to work with others.

“We’re more communicative now. You can’t avoid meeting and talking with people, yet the noise isn’t there. It’s quiet. People are closer to each other, and that also adds a bit more accountability,” says Loney.

In their old offices, clients were rarely encouraged to meet at the firm’s offices. “Now they’re here all the time. They understand the benefits of this space, and they feel comfortable here,” says Loney. Already the firm has become a favorite site for meetings of organizations the firm’s staff are involved in, and a regular stop on the Kalamazoo Arts Council’s quarterly art tour at area businesses.

Mikon says the firm’s new workplace is the real deal. “When we planned this new space, we talked about better outcomes, about a space that inspires people. And we proceeded with the understanding that some of the benefits of our new space might not be measurable, but that they would be real.

Do I think that those things are real now? Yes, a hundred percent. Not ninety-nine percent –one hundred percent real.”



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Products used:

Steelcase®: Answer® systems furniture, Leap® task seating, Universal storage.

Turnstone®: Kick® systems furniture, Uno™, Jacket™, Jenny™, and Sweeper seating, Groupwork tables
Details® Slatwall and FYI Monitor Arms

PolyVision® Walk-and-Talk™ Interactive Whiteboard

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