

# User-Friendly Offices



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**M**icrosoft Canada has taken its commitment to bringing user-friendly software to consumers and has extended a similar commitment to its employees. The software company recently celebrated the grand opening of its Mississauga, Ontario headquarters – an office which is being touted as “Canada’s most advanced and user-friendly workplace environment.”



Some unique design elements of the 170,000 square foot building include: natural light coming from floor to ceiling glass walls; superb air quality distribution through a raised floor; and completely wireless networks and cabling throughout the entire building, allowing for work area flexibility.

“This is about Microsoft providing human comfort. We want to encourage staff to be more social and more interesting. Essentially, this is a reinvestment in personnel,” explained Building Architect Dermot Sweeney, of Dermot Sweeney Architects.

And so, in the interest of breaking down dictatorial-type workplace barriers, the Microsoft building was designed to encourage staff interactivity. With an inviting cafeteria and impressive health club facility (equipped with massage therapy clinics), staff is encouraged to have fun at work.

In terms of actual workstations, it’s interesting to see very low risers at cubicles (with removable barricades), allowing for total open concept with colleagues, if staff prefer to work that way.

Even more interesting, are the management

## *The latest user-friendly product from Microsoft Canada is its brand new corporate headquarters*

offices. Management offices are centrally located in the core of all departments, and are enclosed in glass. Being transparent, staff can see when their manager is accessible, and managers feel more connected with their teams because of their physical proximity to them.

If someone has an impromptu visitor, it’s no problem in this building. There are 25 different



meeting places, ranging from casual to formal. As well, there are several “mobile touch down” cubicles to accommodate road warriors.


If an employee just wants to sit in a different setting, other than their regular office space for a change, they can go almost anywhere in the building with their laptop and either connect wirelessly or plug-in to land line cabling in the floor. Microsoft encourages staff to forget traditional office protocol and in fact, that’s why Microsoft is providing alternative work areas throughout the building – for staff that wish to diversity their work habits.

Aside from the psychology of the workplace environment, great care was taken when it comes to the physical workplace environment, also. The “under-floor” at Microsoft’s new office is filled with pressurized supplied air that is slightly above typical oxygen levels – which is beneficial when it comes to guarding against chronic aches and pains commonly associated with workplace environments. The building also consists of individual oxygen vents than can be

adjusted to personnel’s own personal preferences.

Also in keeping with the concern for the well-being of staff, all office furniture has been designed to be instantly detachable and adjustable – it can be customized to any individuals’ height. And sunshades on all glass walls obstruct any glare coming into workspaces, allowing staff to work without any strain on their eyes.



In the eyes of Gordon Jekubik, Director of Business Operations at Microsoft Canada, “Any seat is a good seat in this building.” 

### OSSA Says It Is Most Cost-Effective To Design Ergonomically-Friendly Environments

It’s safer and more cost-effective to design a work environment to fit the worker than to make the worker fit into the workplace, according to the Ontario Service Safety Alliance (OSSA).

The OSSA reveals that with proper attention to ergonomics, injuries can be reduced, as well as compensation claims and absenteeism. Companies will also see an increase in productivity and morale.

As long as there is a commitment from management to make office ergonomics a priority and worker involvement in this commitment, the positive benefits are inevitable.

To obtain more information about workplace health and safety issues from the OSSA, visit [www.ossa.com](http://www.ossa.com).