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# THE PAPERLESS CHASE

## Fitch Even's new flagship space came with a surprising edict – go paper-free

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**W**hen intellectual property firm Fitch, Even, Tabin & Flannery sought to move its flagship office to the 21st floor of 120 S. LaSalle St., it did so with a surprising edict to itself: It had to support a 100 percent paper-free environment.

Many law firms are moving in that direction, but managing partner Mark Hetzler said the firm has been paperless since June 2017. It was essential for the firm to go completely paperless before it transitioned to the new space — just a few floors above its previous space — on Feb. 12.

“Before we could even design the floor layout, we needed to figure out if we can do this paperless thing,” Hetzler said. “Would there be buy-in from both senior attorneys and younger staff?”

The firm completed a trial rollout for the paperless environment with a few attorneys, including Hetzler, who was one of the original supporters of the idea. The firm employs LexisNexis as well as a customized document management system via Microsoft’s SharePoint platform. All documentation is cloud-based.

“I was a big proponent of it because I knew the potential savings,” Hetzler said. “It’s very expensive to store paper here in the heart of Chicago.”

The firm allowed six months — “a very long leash,” Hetzler said — to get the system up and running. “We needed to get that footing first because we knew we wanted to design the space with no place for paper.”

“About 80 percent of the staff got on board with it,” he said. “There were 20 percent that we had to just take the files away from them at the end and some people were using a few files up until the move that they were not allowed to take.”

The transition resulted in a profound change in how the firm manages documentation, including the fact that 100 printers in the previous office space are now down to three.

“The only paper you will see here is that which lawyers print off for notes,” Hetzler said. “And most of the lawyers will scan that into the file management system. You can’t get a file folder if you wanted one.”

### WITH THE TIMES

Fitch Even traces its heritage back to 1859, when it was founded as Goodwin, Larned & Goodwin. They spent 20 years at 135 S. LaSalle St., kitty-corner to its current location, before moving to 120 S. LaSalle St. in 1998. Before the move to 21, the firm occupied all of the 16th floor and part of the 15th.

The move was initially inspired by the reasons many firms move — to freshen things up a bit while cutting costs and upgrading technology.

“We decided about four or five years out that we needed to do something different,” Hetzler said, “We needed to modernize the way the new workforce and millennials like to see things.”

Freshening things up included what’s now a common trend among firms: switching to near-universal office sizes and dedicating the larger corner

office spaces to conference and meeting areas, each with their own flourishes and personality.

The labyrinthine and static configuration of the support staff cubicles in the former space were ditched for a modular setup that also allows more light throughout the office. In addition, two smaller kitchens — one on each floor of the old space — have been scrapped for a single, larger multipurpose room where the staff can eat, gather and watch television on the two large screens.

“The [old spaces] weren’t as inviting and there wasn’t as much seating,” Hetzler said. “We wanted to add an area where people could mingle and meet with each other or be by themselves.”

### TIGHTENING THINGS UP

In the move to the 21st floor, the firm dropped nearly half of its square footage, going from about 45,000 square feet to 26,000. That much square footage was no longer necessary considering what the firm gave up in going paperless: File rooms accounted for about a third of the old space.

The dedicated library from the previous space also no longer exists; the “library” is now a standup table on which employees can congregate with about 20 books that survived the digital cut stacked underneath. Streamlining telecommunications technology also allowed the firm to cut back on rooms that housed servers.

Fitch Even is also trending away from desktop computers and issuing more laptops — a result of the firm moving toward employees working remotely; a trend that also factored into how the new space was developed.

“We didn’t want to oversubscribe to space when we know that there’s going to be a lot more lawyers working remotely in the future,” he said. “We’ve already started allowing some lawyers to work remotely, but it hasn’t trickled down to all members of the staff yet.”

Perhaps the biggest spatial contrast between the old and new spaces is the reception area. It’s now spacious, furnished and inviting, offering great views of the Loop from its windows.

“You came off the elevator and you basically banged into the reception desk,” Hetzler said of the old reception space. “It was literally maybe five tile squares away from that elevator bank, and there was no light.”

The new efficiency throughout the office is reflected in the move itself. Hetzler said the process was far easier and more streamlined than the move to the building 20 years ago.

“We probably lost four weeks in our move 20 years ago because of downed computers, moving files and things of that nature,” Hetzler said. “When we moved here, the network was on and the system was already running in the cloud. There was no disruption at all.” CL

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