



NASA engineers use Nexus by Ghent for improved collaboration



Background

Best known as the headquarters of Mission Control for Space Shuttle launches, NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, is embarking on a new journey. With a continued primary mission of monitoring and controlling the international Space Station, JSC has also been charged with exploration, research and discovery.

Challenge

In December 2009, the White House issued the Open Government Directive calling on Executive Branch agencies to become more open and accountable. The Directive is centered on the principles of transparency, collaboration, and participation. This would result in NASA becoming a role model of how a government agency can break down silos, facilitate working relationships, and collaborate on projects not only in Houston but all over the world. The end result is to get more done, faster, with less.

JSC employees have met their communication challenge head-on, with The SP.ACE. First of its kind, The SP.ACE is a dedicated environment for any of the 3,000 Civil Service employees across this 22,000 acre campus to work together and explore. "A space that deserves the energy and creativity of those who inhabit it, because it is adaptive, innovating and engaging...a space where challenging the normal rules of business is encouraged," as excerpted from the mission statement written on a whiteboard in The SP.ACE.

So, how do you furnish a room with these high expectations? Joel Walker, Director of Facilities Administration, sought the latest furniture that would facilitate innovative discussions and group collaboration.



Solution

Nexus by Ghent, a portable whiteboard system that allows for flexible and mobile collection of thoughts, soon became part of The SP.ACE. “We need furnishings here that are simple and don’t require much training. We want people to be able to come here, get inspired and quickly get to work”, says Joel.

Nexus Tablets are also in use in The SP.ACE. A 28” square, portable whiteboard, The Nexus Tablet can be used by smaller groups and then brought back to the main group and hooked onto the side of the easel. In The SP.ACE, Nexus Tablet Boards can be found all around the room wherever whiteboard surfaces are needed for that particular day. Because the Tablets only weigh 3 pounds, they are easily transported.

Even though James McClellan, Johnson’s Chief Technology Officer is driving technology innovations for the Office of the Future, he sees the need for low tech tools like the whiteboard. “Engineers can’t talk without drawing... and sometimes you just need to pick up a marker and start.” Often the engineers need to collaborate with remote locations within the US and around the world. Using an application such as Adobe Connect, and a laptop camera pointed at a whiteboard, the remote locations can participate in the discussion as if they were right in the room. Chris Gerty, Program Specialist for the Open Government Initiative, added that he quickly photographs the ideas on the whiteboards so he can text them to his team for immediate follow-up after meetings.

Nexus by Ghent is in use in the office spaces as well. As an alternative to hanging permanent whiteboards in every office, portable boards like Nexus provide more flexibility and reduce costs. “It could cost up to \$500 just to install a wall-mounted whiteboard; and then it can’t be shared with others in the building. Well-structured whiteboards on wheels allow us the flexibility to reconfigure work spaces and move people around much more easily,” says Joel Walker.

Result

Nexus is helping to facilitate open, collaborative sessions at one of the most innovative environments in the world. And, since placing Nexus’ very first order, NASA has come back for more. What’s next? Perhaps Nexus by Ghent could be headed to the International Space Station. You never know.

For more information about The SP.ACE at Johnson Space Center, please visit, http://www.nasa.gov/offices/oce/appel/ask-academy/issues/volume4/ata_4-5_working_outside_box_jsc.html and information about Nexus By Ghent, can be found at www.nexusbyghent.com.

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