

# BUILDINGS BROUGHT TO LIFE

*Owners can create more profitable assets by enhancing their buildings' form and function.*

Tom Stacy

No matter how sophisticated, modern or dated, buildings are more than simply shells for businesses. They may be bricks and mortar, but they lie directly to the ebb and flow of their communities and economies.

So how can an owner create a more profitable asset? Think form and function. Form gives buildings an attractive, substantial value-proposition for tenants. Function allows its systems to be streamlined and operate efficiently. Together, form and function create a building's personality. Every building has one, yet some are more inviting and interesting than others.

If an owner can bring form and function to bear on its asset such that it supports the tenants' operational demands and fills a need within a community, it can retain and attract tenants. If the building can be managed with an eye to maximize efficiency and tenant service, it will be vibrant and successful, enduring way beyond the initial interest generated by the owner's re-marketing strategy.

Form and function transform mediocre returns into profit centers that support the total vitality of a city.

But re-marketing buildings — particularly downtown high-rises — requires vision. Re-marketing doesn't simply mean redeveloping superficial elements of the edifice, it refers to the reshaping of the product to realize sub-

stantial, tangible results.

Re-marketing begins with simple questions. An owner must evaluate every asset or benefit of the property. Where is it located? Who does the building serve? How can it capitalize on the building's innate assets? How can the building be further differentiated from its competition? And what's realistic in terms of ROI?

The fundamental, functional elements of the building also must support the re-marketing vision. Revitalizing common areas and maintaining all "customer-facing" environments to the highest standards possible is critical. The building's "brand" is supported by its daily operations, which must clearly live up to the re-marketing vision. Approaching a building holistically generates value.

"Buildings are successful when the new re-marketing efforts are in line with the core functions of a building," says Robert Ledbetter, president of BOMA Austin. "If tenants are disgruntled over the fundamentals, it will diminish other upgrades."

If the fundamentals are well-executed, what's next?

Business owners ultimately want to do business in a facility that supports their needs as an organization. Location, convenience, responsive building staff and an attractive appearance are all top requests. The key to today's tenants is also the expectation that their technological needs will be supported. A building unable to support advanced communications is a building unprepared to support business.

The buzz surrounding

wired buildings reached a roar during the height of the dot-com era. Across the country, commercial property owners sought to leverage the business community's appetite for all things tech-related. As the downtown took hold, the buzz quickly wore off. Downtown Austin was struck with high-vacancies and decreasing interest in its marquee buildings, and the concept of wired buildings ceased to make headlines. During the quiet afforded by a slow-moving economy, innovation pushed forward.

In 2006, IP telephony, high-speed bandwidth, is no longer in its infancy — it's a technology that growing numbers of businesses and residences are leveraging for cost-effective, dynamic communications. IP telephony enables users to bypass traditional phone companies, connect phone to email, check messages via email remotely, hold video conference calls, control phone systems online and exchange large amounts of data without disrupting networks.

Telecommunications is no longer about long-distance phone calls; it's the complete integration of the daily information exchange that transpires within a business. High-speed Internet communications was central to the wired buildings of the past. Today, with the maturity of VoIP technologies, all organizations can leverage the advantages and productivity gains of high-speed data exchange.

In downtown Austin, 515 Congress, a black-glass, 26-story high-rise, is situated on Austin's most prestigious and legendary intersection, Sixth Street and Congress Avenue, or "Main and Main." By appearance, it's a dark horse in com-

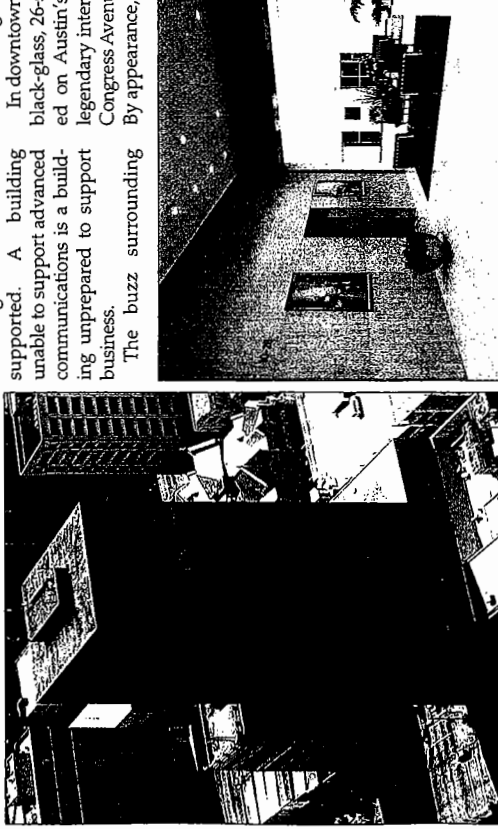
Austin. Working closely with Cisco, T. Stacy developed and implemented a multi-tenant VoIP system that ultimately enables new and existing tenants to leverage a state-of-the-art IP telephony and high-speed data system. The new network also links to key building systems, enabling tenants to access motion-detecting video surveillance systems and monitor their individual energy usage from anywhere. As a result, new tenants experience a seamless transition and communication system upgrade in their move. Other technology advancements, to complement the communications system, include wireless connectivity throughout the building and LCD televisions in the elevators.

The transformation of 515 Congress extends to not only the technology, but to the general appearance and purpose of the building. Façade changes to the ground level were made immediately, along with remodeling of the lobby, elevators, common corridors and restrooms. The look is classic and modern, ensuring its appeal will endure for many years.

Retail is a key part of the strategy. Keeper's, a men's fine apparel store, is located in 515 Congress' oversized lobby area. The opening of the store marks the return of retailers that were located downtown for more than 50 years. Retail, however, will extend beyond the lobby. The second stage of 515 Congress' re-marketing is the development of a second tower. Envisioned as a mixed-use development, it will feature a multi-story shopping center, residences and additional corporate space. The tower, to be completed in 2008, is expected as the final leg of 515 Congress' total transformation.

Downtown Austin, at a new juncture in its renaissance, is attracting increasing numbers of businesses and residences. The success of the Second Avenue shopping district and the 5,400 people who now call downtown Austin home are the product of a long-term vision. At the heart of all this is a sophisticated, value-added, work-live-play environment that supports a dynamic, multifaceted city poised for ongoing growth during the coming decades. In other words, it is a marriage of form and function.

T. Stacy & Associates re-marketed 515 Congress in Austin by addressing its exterior (above left) and interior needs. Changes were made to its ground-level façade, along with the remodeling of its lobby (above right), elevators, common corridors and restrooms.



Tom Stacy is president of T. Stacy and Associates in Austin, Texas.