

IMPROVED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE WITH **LIVE DESIGN**

In 2007, Steelcase – the largest office furniture manufacturer in the world – chose Configura to help simplify its design and specification process.

By investing in a CET Designer Extension that launched in 2008, Steelcase has revolutionized the way its dealers sell products. Today, nearly all Steelcase dealers in North America use CET Designer along with the proprietary Extension, SmartTools, as the total solution for their design and specification needs.

The person who led this change was Steve Eriksson. His 25-year career at Steelcase has spanned managing service groups, model shops, test labs and specials engineering teams. In these roles, he gained an in-depth understanding of the entire product and sales cycle.

With this depth of knowledge, the company tapped him about 10 years ago to be part of the EXPerience Team, which focused on the experience between Steelcase, its independent dealers and customers. His first major objective was to find better technology to handle design and specification at the dealer level.

Steve and his team initiated the project by conducting a survey among Steelcase dealerships. Speaking with managers, salespersons and designers, it was crucial to learn from anyone at the dealership who played a role in selling Steelcase products.

The team's research concluded that a significant problem in the existing workflow was the cost of errors made in the design process. The software they were using was not aiding the designer, who had to manually account for all the product parts and pieces.

Another major issue was the time invested to train a new person to become a proficient designer. The technology they were using did not support the designer who was responsible to know the products inside out and to understand all product rules.

These major issues left the team looking for a different solution.

CASE STUDY: **STEELCASE**

For over 100 years, Steelcase Inc. has helped create great experiences for the world's leading organizations, across industries. They demonstrate this through their family of brands – including Steelcase®, Coalesse®, Designtex®, Details®, PolyVision® and Turnstone®. Together, they offer a comprehensive portfolio of architecture, furniture and technology products and services designed to unlock human promise and support social, economic and environmental sustainability.

Steelcase is globally accessible through a network of channels, including over 800 dealer locations. Steelcase is a global, industry-leading and publicly traded company with fiscal 2015 revenue of \$3.1 billion. Steelcase and Configura have cooperated since 2007, a partnership that has resulted in business improvements for Steelcase's sales, design, order and manufacturing processes. Today, Steelcase's CET Designer Extension SmartTools is used by more than 1,300 designers and salespeople worldwide.



Selecting a new design and specification tool

It was determined that the Steelcase team would seek an established and sustainable solution as opposed to developing a new tool on their own.

“We were looking for more than software. We were looking for a comprehensive solution – something that would solve the problem of selling complex, configurable products,” Steve said. “We wanted a company that understood this problem, knew how to apply technology to solve it and that we could see ourselves working with long-term.”

The team initially identified about 10 companies that potentially could deliver what they were looking for.

Configura, with a 15-year track record of success in Europe, was one of these companies.

Eventually, Steelcase narrowed the pool to three candidates, including Configura. At this point, Steelcase challenged each candidate to develop a prototype. Each candidate received a Steelcase spec guide filled with product data and 30 days to complete the task.

Because Configura was a relative newcomer in the North American market, Steelcase conducted additional due diligence, sending a team to Configura’s headquarters in Linköping, Sweden, which helped them to get to know the people behind the solution and to ensure the legitimacy of the company. Configura passed the test.

At the end of 30 days, Steelcase reviewed what the three competitors had produced.

“The first company wasn’t interested in teaching us or opening up their code. I’m not even sure they could at that point,” Steve said. “Instead, they wanted all manufacturers to come to them and pay them a lot of money to enter their products.”

For a company like Steelcase, with hundreds of product lines, this option was not feasible. They needed to be able to have their own programmers.

“The second company spent the whole day trying to convince us that we didn’t need anything more than what they currently offered, which wasn’t enough,” Steve said.

Finally, it was Configura’s turn. “Configura sent a small team of their programmers to show some really cool stretching of panels, nothing like the others had shown us,” Steve said. “Everything sort of grew from that first demo. We determined that a ‘configuration engine’ like the one behind CET Designer was what we were looking for, and it looked like it could handle the significant complexity of our product configurations.”

Steve Eriksson, Principle Consultant at Steelcase.



Getting dealerships on board

Changing an organization's main design and specification tool doesn't happen overnight. To make the transition easier, Steelcase developed a three-step approach to help its dealers:

- 1)** The dealership begins with a small group of designers to get them on board. They all go through Beginner and Advanced CET Designer training to become proficient in and confident with the software.
- 2)** The dealership moves into the full-adoption stage, bringing the entire design team to an advanced level of CET Designer. The designers start exploring additional CET Designer Extensions such as Edit Graphics, which allows them to create specials.
- 3)** Finally, the dealership starts looking into its own design process. This third step is the most challenging, as it often requires the organization to change.

"The third step is really where the money is because it's about using this new tool and its capabilities to reevaluate and improve the process," Steve explained. "You're looking at things like, 'Where can we reduce the number and length of turns?', 'How can we do a better job engaging the customer?' This third step really requires someone to drive the change, because nobody likes change. But, it's necessary, and it pays off in the end."

Implementing CET Designer at Steelcase dealerships has opened up this discussion, not only between Steelcase and its dealers but also among and within dealerships.

Today, 95 percent of Steelcase dealerships are at step two, and many are moving into step three, according to Steve. As more dealerships undergo this transition, they're looking at how they can leverage the technology to improve their design process.

Live design – where the money is

One of the major changes for Steelcase dealerships is that they can now do "live design." A designer can meet with a customer, either in person or virtually, and, using CET Designer, take them through the entire design process, creating a space and specifying products in 2D and 3D views as the customer watches. It allows the customer to join the design process in a real and collaborative way.

"You'd never do live design with the old software – they'd throw you out of the building – but it works great with CET Designer," Steve said. "Having a designer, not a salesperson, sit down with a customer and the A&D firm and literally go through the design process – adding products and changing the designs in front of their eyes, while they can see the pricing automatically being calculated – gives the customer, and the A&D firm, an ownership of the design in a way they never had before."



The solution has saved Steelcase dealerships a lot of time. When Steelcase first conducted its research at the dealerships, the average number of turns (the number of times a project is sent back and forth between the dealership and the customer) was seven per project. With live design, the number of turns is reduced because changes can be made on the spot with the customer. Faster changes in person means fewer phone calls and emails – resulting in less overall time spent on a project.

With CET Designer, dealerships can do more for existing customers – resulting in happier customers and often leading to repeat business. CET Designer's efficiencies also make it easier and faster for dealerships to respond to new project opportunities.

“Overall, we see three great wins for dealerships adopting CET Designer. First, because the dealers have engaged the customer in a great experience that they won't forget, they want to come back. Second, the dealerships are able to quote on more work. Third, these positive results have helped our dealers to evaluate and improve upon their sales and order process,” Steve said.

New manufacturing opportunities because of CET Designer

In addition to changing dealerships' sales processes, CET Designer has also enabled Steelcase to look differently at how it manufactures products.

“Before CET Designer, we followed a common practice in our industry: style number equals size of object, which means if you want to change the size of something, you have to delete the style number, and the graphic, and enter a different one,” Steve explained.

Recently, a new data format has been introduced in some of Steelcase's products, including in its VIA Wall System. This new format allows for a more intelligent specification with fewer style numbers and a lot more options. One of the strengths is that true parametric values can be read directly into SAP, hence removing the need for multiple style numbers for the same product.

“In this new world, you have a style number, with size as options,” Steve explained. “When changing, for example the size, in CET Designer, you do this by dragging the graphic, and it gives you a visual image of what the product will look like. The new size of the product doesn't require a separate style number because all calculations are done by the software and sent through as parameters. Since no other software company has chosen to do it this way, only CET Designer can handle those of our products that require this behavior.”

The new system means that Steelcase can offer products in this format in any size and still get an immediate quote for the product. This strength can be seen in one of Steelcase's latest products. The company's new whiteboard does not come in increments nor does it need to be ordered as a special. Instead, designers can adjust the board to the exact size that they want, within limits, and CET Designer will automatically generate a price.



CET Designer has been loaded with rules that tell it exactly how to handle the calculations, which parts to add when the whiteboard is a specific size, etc. The information is then sent through a direct link into the order management system connected to the manufacturing facility. Since all of the calculations are very specific, the order information can't be changed once it leaves CET Designer.

"A VIA wall might have 30 parts in it, and if you stretch it an eighth of an inch, the parts inside the wall will be affected. These walls are truly parametric and so complex that it is impossible for a designer to manually keep track of all of that, but it works with CET Designer," Steve said. "So the new data format gives us the opportunity to do parametric products, and it also gives us the opportunity to have a more intelligent specification."

Where Steelcase is today

CET Designer is now the design and specification tool of choice in most Steelcase dealerships.

"When we started to track how many dealerships were using CET Designer a year and a half ago, we found that about 55 percent of design-tool-generated sales came from CET Designer. So, we did a push to get more people adopting the solution, and now we have a number of dealerships that use CET Designer 100 percent," Steve said.

Steve's ultimate goal is to offer a complete design tool to Steelcase dealers worldwide that can take them all the way from the initial bid to sending the finalized order to the manufacturing facility.

"It shouldn't matter if our dealerships are working on site in Moscow or Milwaukee or Mozambique. They should have a complete design tool with all of the products that Steelcase can offer, no matter where they are in the world," Steve said. "Overall, this has been a very productive relationship. It's not every day you manage to develop and implement an industry-wide solution in less than 10 years."

Amanda Loehle, Co-op in Steelcase's Technical Curriculum for Interior Design.

