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REPORT ON BUSINESS

Web tools help solve moving hassles

By: *Deborah King*

Stan Krawitz's idea for a Web-based communications system that helps to find, lease and outfit premises for corporate space users seems so simple and makes so much sense that it's a wonder no one thought of it long ago.

In essence, Toronto-based Real Facilities Inc. ensures that commercial, industrial and retail clients are able to be in their new space when they need to be - on time and ready to go - without having to see to all the details themselves and without spending vast sums to hire all the suppliers required.

The company's Web site, www.realfacilities.com, provides various tools for clients to ascertain what their needs are, and lets them try a demo to see how the software works.

That software is known as FLOW (Find, Lease, Outfit and Work), and Mr. Krawitz, the company's founder and president, holds the proprietary rights. "No one else is offering this type of product in Canada," he said, "and, as far as I know, we're the first to be doing it in North America."

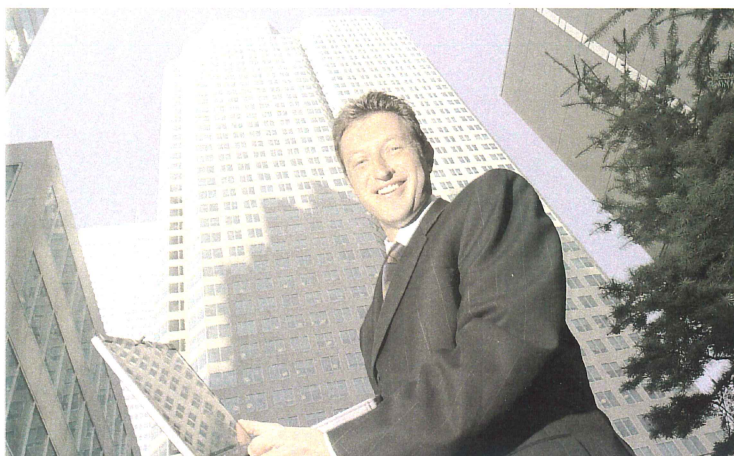
He and his group of commercial real estate professionals are using the Internet to unify commercial real estate brokerage with design, construction, technology, furnishings, moving and project management.

The nine-member, privately held company, which was founded last November, operates in the Greater Toronto Area, from Oakville in the west to Newmarket in the north to Oshawa in the east.

"We'd really like to expand this to major centres across Canada," Mr. Krawitz said, "but that's down the road a bit."
"We're still quite new and the GTA's our focus right now."

He said that Real Facilities' role is to deal with landlords and multi-people suppliers, and to negotiate pricing. He added that other brokers represent both landlords and tenants, but Real Facilities represents only its clients, arranging for the best and most flexible lease based on each client's special needs or interests.

Among the tools on the Web site is an office



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space calculator, which uses industry standards and interactive questions to help a company decide how much space it needs.

Using search tools, companies also can select the area they wish to relocate to and look up all available properties in that section of the GTA. The database is extensive and updated daily, plus there is a dedicated representative who will provide customized research and advice.

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Real Facilities' staff also use a "needs analysis" questionnaire to assess a client's current and future needs. Taking those answers and putting them together with market information on available space and comparable transactions, Real Facilities then sets up a customized search program, with the goal of finding the ideal space and arranging a lease that has maximum flexibility and competitive financial terms.

And clients need not fear that a competitor can learn about their plans. The Web site offers secure document sharing and on-line project management. This allows the staff to store documents such as leases and floor plans, leave messages for team members and track the project's progress on a secure site.

Project management is a mini-division of the company, Mr. Krawitz said, and it is run by vice-president Gregory Park, who has his own staff in addition to the company's nine members.

"We offer the complete package," Mr. Krawitz said.

"We'll arrange any new electrical work, design changes, furnishings, so the client does not have to get involved with those service providers.

"However, if someone says they have a brother who's an engineer or electrical expert and they want to use him, we can accommodate that.

"We can work with that type of variation within the dedicated project management team.

"Project management is the one area where it all gets co-ordinated, whether we're doing it all for them or incorporating a service provider that is specified by the client."

One of the company's clients is Siebel Systems Inc., a major e-business software player based in San Mateo, Calif.

The company has leased 107,000 square feet of office space at the Steeles Technology Campus, which is located in the north end of Toronto, for its new combined Canadian operations. Siebel recently acquired Toronto-based Janna Systems Inc.

Linda Jansen, vice-president of facilities and real estate for Siebel, said that "Real Facilities was able to help us select and secure a strategic property in the midst of uncertainty associated with a major acquisition. The results were outstanding and a key factor in a successful merger."

Mr. Krawitz said his company's advantage in being able to readily raise initial investment capital was the fact that the concept had a bricks-and-mortar foundation.

"We are one of the few New Economy ventures today with real products, services and clients. One of the reasons for our success is that we did not go out and develop a technology that was waiting for an audience.