

Current Comments

New Year, New Building

Number 1

January 7, 1980

During the past year ISI® underwent a number of important changes. We introduced several new products and expanded others, which I described in earlier essays.¹⁻⁷ Now, I want to tell you about another important milestone in ISI's history—the completion of our new headquarters in September and our move in October.

The ISI odyssey began about 25 years ago in a converted chicken coop in New Jersey. In 1956 we moved to a tenement building at 1523 Spring Garden Street, Philadelphia. A few years later we moved to 1122 Spring Garden Street. In 1961 we moved to 33 South 17th Street, where we occupied several floors of a modern but small office building. Then we moved once more, to 325 Chestnut Street near Philadelphia's Independence Hall.

Since our lease was to expire in October 1979, we had to decide in 1977 whether or not to continue renting space at that location. ISI had been growing steadily, and we had expanded into every available office in that building. The dispersion of offices on so many floors was inconvenient and inefficient.

Every time we launched a new project or product we had to completely reorganize our office space. This was often a hassle and expensive as well. Like so many airports, ISI seemed to be in a constant state of reconstruction. Working under such conditions was often a strain. And there were many

other problems in the building. The air conditioning system was a horror. Also, many facilities necessary for conducting a business like ISI's were just not available. It was clear that we had to move, as the deteriorating work environment would only compromise our efficiency and the timeliness of our services.

We looked for other suitable buildings we could rent, but our task force, which was formed for this purpose, had to conclude that nothing suitable was available. So instead of trying to adapt our needs to already existing office structures, we reluctantly decided to design and build a new headquarters custom-made to our requirements as an information company. The task force then helped to select an architect. Thanks to the suggestion of Martin Meyerson, president of the University of Pennsylvania, we learned about the work of Robert Venturi. After the bidding procedure we selected Venturi and Rauch.

One of the country's most influential and dynamic architectural firms, Venturi and Rauch has had a lot of experience in designing "everyday" structures—stores, offices, firehouses.⁸ Venturi believes that everyday low-budget structures don't have to appear dull or anonymous to serve their purpose well.⁹ The color illustration of our building included in last week's *Current Contents*® (CC®)* shows that a building can be designed with a unique exterior and in-

dividuality. I wanted a building that everyone would recognize as a lively and distinctive contribution to the community and to the information industry.

I'm proud to point out that we succeeded in moving offices for about 350 people without missing an issue of *CC*. In fact, none of our production schedules was upset by the move. There was, however, a temporary delay in filling some orders for tear sheets since thousands of journal issues had to be boxed, moved, and unboxed over a weekend.

While we were under tight budgetary constraints when constructing our headquarters, the building is by no means a no-frills structure. ISI's new four-story building provides a great deal of inside space—a total of 130 thousand square feet. The interior is designed on an open plan to take full advantage of this large area. Open planning makes use of free-standing partitions instead of permanent walls. This gives us the flexibility we need. Departments can be rearranged overnight to permit new working relationships without the noise and dust from knocking down walls.

Open space is a controversial approach to office planning. To have the maximum flexibility in physical "partitioning," we had to deal with the potential problem of a lack of privacy. There can be no doubt that ISI's new offices are incredibly quiet. The feeling as you enter the work area is not unlike that of the *Discovery in 2001: A Space Odyssey*. In spite of the open space arrangement the overall noise level is significantly lower than in most office buildings.

I don't think there was ever an office building designed with more attention to acoustics. The building's construction prevents sound from bouncing off one wall to another. The high ceiling is covered by an unbroken blanket of thick insulation that soaks up noise.

Wall-to-wall carpeting was installed for its sound-absorbing quality as well as its good looks. Also, all partitions are constructed and arranged to absorb sound. There is even an unobtrusive, electronic conversation-masking system on each floor. For some people the noise level may be too low while for others a period of adjustment is required so that one does not hear conversations in adjacent areas. To eliminate this problem extra thick partitions were installed to give total acoustic privacy.

Poor lighting is a major source of tiring stress in the office. Many offices today are equipped with fluorescent lights whose glare and high contrasts cause eyestrain. Most of the light coming from ISI's custom-designed lighting fixtures is directed upward. The ceiling's flat surface diffuses the light before reflecting it down to the work area. The result is softer lighting with virtually no shadows.

ISI's new headquarters is a top-rated fire structure. Fire safety is absolutely essential at ISI because the large volume of journals we store on the premises presents an additional fire hazard. Apart from the fact that all ISI services would be seriously delayed if our library were to be damaged by fire, we want the maximum protection for our employees. Therefore, construction materials, office furniture, carpets, partitions, and all surfaces have been made flame-resistant to retard the spread of fire. In the unlikely event that a fire should occur, each floor has its own fire and smoke detectors tied into a central alarm system.

Just as the loss of our journal collection could be devastating so could the loss of access to our computers. The computer room has its own sophisticated fire-control system. Our extensive tape library is vital to our continuing operations. Although duplicates of all ISI tapes are maintained in a fire-proof

storage area outside of Philadelphia, fire could cause delays in our regular schedule. Highly sensitive fire and smoke sensors are located above the computer room's ceiling and below its floor. An important feature of the fire extinguishing system is that it uses an inert gas called Halon. Halon smothers fires without damaging equipment or harming people who may still be in the room when the gas is discharged.

To help insure the integrity of ISI's data, access to the computer room is strictly controlled. Authorized personnel use a special magnetic card and identification number. The computer room's door unlocks automatically if the card is valid and the correct number code is keyed. A pass-through window allows transactions with computer personnel without having to admit anyone into the room. Tour groups and other ISI guests can view the room through a large, floor-to-ceiling window in one wall.

To help customer calls get through to the right people at ISI we've installed a new telephone system. Suppose you are trying to call Laura Fisher in the subscription department. If she happens to be in the treasurer's office, the call is automatically transferred there. If her line is busy when you call, she will hear a distinctive tone to let her know an outside caller is waiting. If you want to talk with anyone in a particular department, your call rings at each desk in sequence until it is answered. Outside calls that remain unanswered are then picked up after four rings by our operator, who will take a message. The new telephone system ensures that calls will never go unanswered and that the person you are trying to reach will get your message. Even after midnight the security guard will answer our phones and, if necessary, take a message.

Overall, the building is designed with an eye to the future, when ISI may want

to expand its work area. We are now using only three of the four floors in our building. The fourth floor will be rented until we need additional space. If we need even more space, an addition can be built on the land which is now used for a parking lot. The entrance, stairways, and support systems (air conditioning, plumbing, heating, etc.) are placed at one end of the building to accommodate an addition. If we enlarge our facilities, the support systems can easily be extended to the new section. The entrance will be centrally located, and the exterior of the addition will blend into the original building.¹⁰

ISI's new address is 3501 Market Street, University City Science Center, Philadelphia, PA 19104. Our new telephone number is 215-386-0100. Our toll-free number stays the same: 800-523-1850, or 1851. Don't worry if you've sent something to our old address. All mail received there will be forwarded promptly to our new building. If you call our old number, an operator will give you our new one.

We're rather proud of our new headquarters! We welcome the opportunity to show it off to interested groups who want to tour the building. The local press has been almost ecstatic about "the new flower on Market Street."¹¹ Even before it was completed its design was included in a show of "Ornament in the Twentieth Century" at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York. And it was also included in a recent exhibition of Venturi and Rauch designs in Zurich, Switzerland.¹²

Many people at ISI were involved in the effort to plan, design, and construct this new building. But there is one person to whom we are primarily indebted for its successful completion, in record-breaking time, at a cost significantly below original estimates. This is ISI's Vice President of Administrative Services, Peter K. Aborn, who headed our

"move" task force. If you are interested in knowing more about the details of this unique building, I suggest you contact ISI for a reprint of his article in the *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science*.¹⁰

Every institution has a life of its own apart from the people it serves. I believe employees deserve the best possible working conditions. This is not independent of ISI's commitment to the prompt delivery of high-quality information services to our customers. By creating a pleasant, fatigue-free work environment we are in a better position to fully realize that commitment. We've always taken pride in the efficient delivery of our services. But new ways of improving efficiency are never exhausted. I'm sure

this change of scene will make our operations even more efficient. Twenty years ago we did not imagine that we would need space to house as many as 500 to 1,000 employees. Today, that not only seems realistic but necessary. The scientist's need and the scholar's appetite for information are almost insatiable. To recognize those needs and to satisfy those appetites is still an active challenge. It's nice to move into a new house but it is important to remember why we are living there.

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My thanks to Patricia Heller and Alfred Welljams-Dorof for their help in the preparation of this essay.

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* The illustration mentioned here was originally printed in color.



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