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Google marches into San Francisco

1,200 staffers expected to pour into new green Hills Plaza digs

San Francisco Business Times - by [J.K. Dineen](#)

Hundreds of **Google** employees are set to move into San Francisco on March 3, with a \$20 million, super-green googlization of 200,000 square feet of former **Gap** space nearing completion.

The 197,000 square feet on three floors of Hills Plaza at 345 Spear St., which is being subleased from the Gap, will eventually house 1,200 workers. The buildout of the space is both a model of sustainable office construction and a rare insight into what matters -- and what is considered superfluous -- in the Google ideology.

On the extravagant side, the office will have one of Google's famous free gourmet cafés, which will weigh in at 4,400 square feet and -- at \$918 a square foot -- will cost more than \$4 million to construct. There will also be a plastic tubular slide which will whisk employees from the third to second floors along a curved staircase, an idea that was borrowed from the company's Zurich office, according to Mark Trento, a vice president of [Skyline Construction](#), which is building the new Google offices.

"The engineer is still working on it," said Trento. "It's a difficult turn -- almost a right angle. I've built out a lot of tenant spaces over the last 25 years and I've never built a slide."

Google will seek certification from the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, the nonprofit that certifies green buildings, and may go after a gold rating, the second highest level of sustainability, according to Mary Davidge, who was LEED consultant on the project.

The driving philosophy behind [Skyline's](#) build-out was to recycle and reuse as much as possible. Staircases were re-covered with carpeting that meets zero carbon manufacturing standards. Existing lighting was retained. Over 35 percent of the furniture left by the Gap was reused and reupholstered to reflect the Google primary color palette. The furnishings have between 20 percent and 30 percent recycled content. Bike parking and showers were provided. The mahogany walls of a conference room -- which hardly reflects Google's clean, modern style -- were kept, because disposing of them would be wasteful.

"We reconfigured and remodeled, but kept it from the landfill as much as we could," said Jay Bechtel, real estate and construction manager for Google.

While the company shelled out heavily for the state of the art café, other parts of its design

sensibility run contrary to typical deluxe office design. There are no private offices, for example; three or four Googlers are sandwiched into small spaces that Gap would have used for one worker.

The tight quarters are standard in Google's offices worldwide, according to Anthony Ravitz, project coordinator for Google.

"It started out because of necessity for our business during the early years when we were so short on space," said Ravitz. "We found it worked really well for our business in terms of helping employees collaborate as we've grown really quickly. Having people close together, they learn so much more quickly than if they are sitting on the other side of a wall."

Overall, the space will work out to almost 200 square foot per worker, but it feels much tighter than that because much of the space is taken up with lounges and "tech talk" rooms. So-called phone-booths and "huddle rooms" are named for San Francisco neighborhoods in one part of the space, and for movies and TV shows filmed in San Francisco on another floor.

"We're dense on square footage per person, but we augment it with amenities," said Bechtel. "We take advantage of every nook and cranny to add a couch or a lounge chair. Or a ping-pong table. It seems to work because people love the amenities."

Bechtel declined to speculate on how quickly the 197,000 square feet would be absorbed.

"We think the space will take care of our needs for the foreseeable future. Accurately projecting head count is an inexact science," he said.

Opening a San Francisco office was itself motivated by environmental concerns. Google provides bio-diesel bus transportation to Mountain View for its workers who live in San Francisco, but allowing city-dwelling employees to walk, bike or take public transportation is even greener, Ravitz said. The San Francisco office will be staffed by a combination of new hires and people moving from Mountain View. While more workers live in San Francisco than the office can accommodate, consideration was given to Google groups that have a large number of city residents.

"The bottom line is we'll move a couple hundred of people from Mountain View and it will be supplemented with more people from Mountain View and new hires," said Bechtel.

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