

# Red Hat's Craig Youst: Leading a Team through Innovation and Collaboration

BY CHELSIE BUTLER

**H**aving a positive impact on people is important to Craig Youst, so being a global leader for software giant Red Hat is a role in which he thrives. Having been with the company now for 11 years, Youst, Senior Director of Global Facilities & Real Estate, touts the company's openness, transparency and collaborative environment.

"We're young, we're a little bit rebellious, and we thrive in open environments because it's all about innovation," he says. "At Red Hat, we're a very flat organization, and we encourage everyone to share their knowledge and to work together to come up with the best ideas."

## What is Red Hat?

Red Hat is the world's leader in Linux and Open Source technologies, making its rapid innovation consumable in mission-critical, enterprise environments. The company sells subscrip-

tions for enterprise technology and services and fosters greater participation in the open source process. From a real estate perspective, since 2001, Red Hat has averaged year-over-year growth exceeding 35 percent.

According to Youst, the average life cycle of a Red Hat office is short because within only a few years, they're knocking down walls or relocating to larger spaces – growth continues to go through the roof all over the globe.

"It is critical for my team to stay proactively in front of this growth," he says. "We're just about to pass a \$1 billion in annual sales, and our CEO has publicly stated that we'll triple in size in less than five years. Growth is definitely what is most influential in how we build our real estate strategy today."

Youst's group reports to the finance department, and he is in charge of such real estate functions as transaction and lease management, facility operations, workplace strategy, sustainability,

workplace health and safety, security and shipping and receiving – all on a global basis.

Red Hat's portfolio is divided into three regions: the Americas; Europe, Middle East and Africa; and Asia Pacific. It has 75 offices in 35 countries, split relatively evenly among three regions, and about 50 percent of its revenue is from the U.S., and 50 percent is international.

## What's in a Workplace?

In tune with the company's collaborative culture and open-source principles, its workspace is open, with only about 5 percent dedicated to private offices. Youst says most of Red Hat's employees are internally mobile – seldom sitting at their work station and continuously working throughout the office in various spaces.

"We find that most Red Hatters want to come to a physical place of some sort with their fellow employees because that's where innovation and collabora-

tion tends to work best," he says. "Of course you can use technology to collaborate, but face-to-face meetings seem to be a stronger collaborative tool."

Although all of its work spaces feature open, collaborative space, each is designed to reflect the area in which it is located, as opposed to having a global feel. An office in Tokyo will reflect Japanese culture, not American. Red Hat also features a detailed workplace strategy program with 12 steps designed to maximize space efficiencies, minimize real estate costs and provide the best business tools to make its employees successful.

"In each project, we use interactive workshops, focal reviews and web-based surveys to really dive deep into how people work and ensure we build the appropriate office space that continues to attract and retain the best talent in that area," says Youst. "Our mantra is all about providing tools and space for our employees to do their work most effectively and where they have the liberty to work wherever they want throughout the space. That's ultimately what I think an effective real estate department is all about."

Because attracting and retaining the



best talent is so important to Red Hat, the company is highly focused on a work-life balance and offers employees a strong range of amenities to continue attracting the top talent. Youst says for three years in a row, Red Hat has been voted the best company to work for in the Czech Republic, which is critical because it's

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where the company's second-largest global office is located.

### Partnering Policy

Youst's real estate team includes more than 90 people across the globe, which he says may be a bit mature for a company of its size, but it is necessary to stay



Red Hat's reception area in Cork, Ireland



A casual workspace in the Beijing location that provides presentation capabilities for informal meetings

in front of its growth. A few functions are outsourced by regionally or globally based companies. And although the company limits the number of partners it has, those it does retain are expected to be a true reflection of the Red Hat culture.

"We have four values: freedom, courage, accountability and commitment, and when we bring a partner onto our team, we expect them to be courageous enough to speak their voice. So even when there's 100 people in the room and 99 of them think one thing, if there is one person who thinks something else, we want them to speak up with the freedom to do that and not be judged," he says. "We also hold them accountable and expect them to deliver very high-quality work, continuously pushing the bar. We like partners who really put forth 110 percent effort with Red Hat and demonstrate leadership and best practices through action, not words."

### Staying Ahead

Youst says from his team's perspective, there are several things they do that keep them in touch with the business. The team schedules regular interactive meetings with general managers, country managers, business unit owners

and the company's corporate leadership team to understand what their strategy is, where the growth is going to be and where they are hiring.

In addition, the team follows up on every project with a post-occupancy evaluation to all employees, which gives them direct feedback on what's working, what's not working – information that is continuously used for future projects to minimize future challenges and add value to the organization.

Another way Red Hat stays ahead of the curve is through dedicated staff who represent the sustainability program for the company as a whole.

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His team recently finished a LEED Gold project in Beijing and has a number of other LEED projects underway, including Red Hat's HQ in Raleigh, N.C., which will also achieve LEED Gold.

While working for a growing company is a positive thing, Youst says it also brings challenges in and of itself.

"We have to ensure that we don't lose

sight of who we are and where we came from," he says. "Our corporate culture is very critical to our success and helps define how we manage real estate. We don't try to be like anyone else; we are Red Hat, and we're very proud of that."

### Connection with CoreNet Global

Youst, who lives with his wife and two daughters in Raleigh, is the President of the Carolinas Chapter, which won two awards at the most recent Summit in Atlanta – the Chapter Membership and Chapter Achievement awards, and which he says is full of positive energy. Youst also appreciates the friendships he's made through the organization.

"I say to people, 'If you really want to interact with the movers and the shakers, this without a doubt is the association to be a part of,'" he adds. "I have never been a part of any other association that has more knowledgeable people than those I've met at CoreNet Global. Just their willingness to work with you and share ideas – I think it's just spectacular. For me, CoreNet Global has been a very positive experience, it's something I really enjoy, and it has helped me stay at the forefront of industry trends and knowledge."