



# Verve Centre

Communication was the key to MMoser Associates' innovative renovation of Nokia's Asia-Pacific headquarters

TEXT: STEVEN OBROVAC PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF MMOSER ASSOCIATES

The office 'plaza', with its cafeteria seating, lofty double-height ceiling and numerous horizontal and vertical connections, serves as the nerve centre of the space

Connecting People' is an apt slogan for cellphone giant Nokia's line of business. And with the recent completion of an extensive renovation of their Asia-Pacific headquarters in Singapore, it applies equally well to their office. The work of office design specialists MMoser Associates, the project transformed an unwieldy, dispersed series of spaces into a volume whose very architecture encourages the spontaneous, face-to-face contact that is the best stimulus for productivity.

"Nokia came to us knowing that they needed to change," remarks Eric Legere, MMoser's director of strategic planning. "They'd been in the same building for over seven years, but what they had was four different 'pockets' of space in various locations around the building — on the ground floor, next door, and finally two continuous floors. They knew they needed to bring it all together". Because of the office's ever-changing headcount and business needs, the client's brief also emphasised the need for flexible workspaces, as well as a generous number of conference areas to accommodate both scheduled and ad hoc meetings.

As MMoser design director Adam Mundy recalls, the design team's first instinct was to simply concentrate areas more logically. "We grouped all the meeting rooms together at one side of the building. We had a grand reception and a big workspace, and it was all highly flexible and beautiful. Then we actually sat down and started thinking about the people who would be working in that space: Do you really want to walk 75m to find a photocopier?"

Facing these rather inconvenient questions, Mundy and his team went back to the drawing board. In plan, their definitive proposal takes the form of a doughnut, with a series of meeting rooms, enclosed offices and a 'plaza' taking the place of the central hole, and an open expanse for workstations arrayed around its periphery. The real brilliance of the layout, however, is in the 'pass-through' corridors bored through the meeting room block, facilitating easy movement from one side of the building to the other and greatly enhancing the office's 'flow'. "One of the biggest challenges was the sheer size of the floorplan — it's 75,000 sq-ft for one floor, and we were dealing with one-and-a-half of these floors," says Mundy. "So to get one person at one end of the building to talk to another person at the other end was a major concern. With this layout, nobody in the space is ever

more than 20m away from the facilities they need."

The true heart of the office, however, is the central 'plaza', an original feature of the space which MMoser greatly expanded and improved upon. Taking advantage of the generous 4.5-5m floor-to-ceiling height, the slab separating the seventh and eighth floors was punched through to create a soaring, double-height volume. To ensure that the two floors are connected vertically as well as horizontally, the void is crisscrossed by bridges and staircases. "The idea is that everybody has to pass through that space — to collect their mail, to get a cup of coffee. That was our way to bring people into the space to interact each other," Mundy explains. "We wanted people to come into the space and not have to think of what to do next. It had to be intuitive."

Away from the office's 'core', further evidence of the design team's profound understanding of both Nokia and its human assets is found in how purely decorative touches were applied. Some of the meeting rooms, for example, are panelled in timber, both as a link to the company's Scandinavian roots and as a means to create an instant sense of warmth and comfort. Also striking are the billboard-like panels suspended from the lofty ceilings and bearing Nokia graphics. "The graphics are placed according to a sequential method, and not just dumped into the space. They always clad copy areas, filing stations, quiet rooms and lift areas. The minute you look at a graphic panel, you know it signifies a certain function," says Mundy.

According to the MMoser team, a crucial factor in developing the finished product was the client's own culture. "Nokia is quite consensus-driven, so from the design stage right through to construction, we had to get consensus from different levels and staff groups," says Legere. As Mundy points out, this transparency had the advantage of helping the process along — all parties involved knew exactly what was happening, why and when.

And as any who happen to visit this Singapore office would agree, the wisdom of the approach is imbued in every feature of the space. It is a huge, even cavernous volume — and yet one that is easier to navigate and more convenient to use than many smaller offices. And most of all, thanks to its intuitive connections and outstanding flow, this is one office that makes business personal. **E**



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The designers converted the plaza into a soaring double-height space by punching through a floor slab • The reception area features a 'bar' with an attractive slab-like countertop • Each workstation is eminently reconfigurable according to the needs of the moment • Stations for photocopiers and other facilities are marked out with their 'billboard' graphic cladding



Nokia and the design team selected workstations by Steelcase for the high degree of flexibility they offer

#### NOKIA PROJECT TEAM

- Charles Corley**  
Director, Singapore Office
- Tay Joo Ann**  
Project director
- Eric Legere**  
Director, strategic planning
- Adam Mundy**  
Regional design director
- Anne Hicks**  
Designer
- Dawn Ng**  
Designer
- Peh Seng Kee**  
Senior engineer
- Kelly Chua**  
Electrical engineer
- Mark Coney**  
Regional construction director
- Steven Ng**  
Project manager



Visit us at [www.mmoser.com](http://www.mmoser.com)

BEIJING ■ GUANGZHOU ■ HONG KONG ■ KUALA LUMPUR ■ LONDON ■ NEW YORK ■ SHANGHAI ■ SINGAPORE ■ TAIPEI