

# Dealer Profile:



## It's a New Brand & a New Day for **Rucker Fuller**, San Francisco Dealer

rucker**R**fuller

In San Francisco, the name of Rucker Fuller has been part and parcel of the office furniture industry since 1876. But when fellow Steelcase dealership Lindsay-Ferrari acquired the company in 1999, the new owners found themselves facing a tough decision.

With the purchase came a new name for a new and much expanded dealership, which now became One Workplace. But the ownership team recognized Rucker Fuller's strong name recognition and also saw potential in the retail operation their new acquisition had maintained for many years.

The challenge: How to maximize the value of the Rucker Fuller name in the marketplace and reposition the retail side of the business in a way that made sense for the company going forward.

Charged with finding a solution to that challenge was Lin Repola, an industry veteran who had joined Rucker Fuller in 1979 as a junior salesperson and by 2007 was sales manager at One Workplace with a primary focus on new business development.

Repola's first priority was to do something about the retail store. "Back then, it was very much a warehouse type operation—a lot of 'scratch and dent' and used furniture, mixed in with some of our sales team's mistakes," she recalls. The store's South of Market location, in a sprawling patchwork of warehouses, nightspots, loft apartments and some of the more tenacious survivors of the dot-com boom, also left something to be desired.

For a while, One Workplace management toyed with the idea of closing the

*continued on page 13*



*Left to right: Design director Andreas Androutsellis meets with sales manager Lin Repola and Rob Nitzsche, executive director, San Francisco, for One Workplace.*

store down completely, but when 5,000 sq. ft. of retail space unexpectedly opened up in the heart of the city's financial district, they saw an opportunity to re-launch and re-brand.

The move brought a new sense of identity and purpose to the Rucker Fuller side of the business. Instead of being an outlet for cheap castoffs, the focus shifted towards a far more viable model: solutions provider and business partner for small and mid-sized companies, with a heavy emphasis on value-priced products, simplified business processes and speed to market.

The new showroom design played a key role in helping to build the new brand. Steelcase and Turnstone product figured in the mix, but so did a broad spectrum of lesser known furniture makers, as Repola implemented an innovative "Manufacturer of the Month" area to underscore the breadth of offering at the new Rucker Fuller.

"We put in what was almost a museum-like approach to presenting office furniture," she explains. "We have our permanent exhibit but we also have special displays that rotate in and out, so that there's always something new."

Manufacturer response was overwhelmingly positive from the outset and Repola has had no trouble maintaining a steady stream of featured vendors' displays.

The concept has played equally well with the local A&D community. "We are literally within blocks of half a dozen of the top design firms in the city," she reports happily. "They're just like everyone else today—looking for more value-driven solutions to fit increasingly tight budgets—and we've

established ourselves as a source of both education and product from companies that they often knew very little about."

Not surprisingly, the WorkPlace Furnishings portfolio of value-driven furniture makers represents an increasingly important resource for Repola and her team.

WPF suppliers Global - The Total Office and Safco have already enjoyed their month in the spotlight as featured manufacturers in the Rucker Fuller showroom and other WPF partners are under consideration.

"Workplace Furnishings and its manufacturers are very important to our future success," Repola contends. "WPF offers a good mix of different products and membership gives us the best discounting that's available, which allows us either to pass along savings to our clients to grow our business or keep our margins higher."

Beyond the showroom, Repola is working on multiple fronts to build the new Rucker Fuller brand.

A new logo and letterhead and new look web site at [www.ruckerfuller.com](http://www.ruckerfuller.com) are key elements of the effort. In addition, Repola has spent much of the past 18 months compiling a database of customer and prospect e-mail addresses and become an aggressive user of the Constant Contact e-marketing program to get word out on new products and special events.

The Rucker Fuller sales team also has a critical role to play in setting the dealership apart, not only from its competitors but also from its parent company.

"We've spent a lot of time over the past 18 months training our sales team so that they can really support our mission and vision," says Repola. "They are true consultants who start out by listening to their clients and learning about their specific needs and then drawing on their product knowledge and industry experi-

ence to develop solutions for those needs," she explains.

Technical expertise is also an important part of the picture. "Each of our salespeople know Giza and that's important on several levels," she points out. "First of all, it enhances the value they can bring to their customers, but it also means we aren't dependent on One Workplace for design resources. That's been a big plus in terms of our overall ability to respond quickly to customers and their needs."

Clearly, the past two years have involved a lot of strategic thinking, tough decisions and hard work for Lin Repola and her team. She has also drawn extensively on One Workplace resources and is generous with her praise of One Workplace president Dave Ferrari and executive director Rob Nitzsche for their support.

Has it all been worth it? "We're still in somewhat of a start-up mode but right now, bookings after the first quarter of 2010 are more than we did in all of last year," she reports proudly. "Business is good and getting better, and after all the changes we've put in place, we're really looking forward to a breakout year for the new Rucker Fuller."

There aren't too many office furniture dealers out there who can make that claim with any confidence these days. The original Mr. Rucker and Mr. Fuller are, of course, long gone. But if they were still around, we have a sneaking suspicion they'd both be wearing broad smiles when they see what their dealership looks like today and consider its prospects for the future.



*The Rucker Fuller team: (left to right): Jason Adams, Danica Capocci, Lin Repola, Anne Godfrey and Andy Anzar.*

*Photo credits: Ramon Alvarado*