
Scott Jenkins, DIRTT – Wowing, Winning and Delivering in Healthcare



Scott Jenkins

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Canadian company DIRTT Environmental Solutions built its name with sustainable, flexible, fast and cost-competitive construction in office and retail design, working with prestigious clients that include everything from AT&T to your local dentist's office. DIRTT - Doing It Right This Time - describes its approach as less a modular wall system than an adaptive approach to rapid construction. With over 440 healthcare projects completed in North America and the Middle East, DIRTT recently was awarded its first project in Singapore. HealthManagement caught up with Scott Jenkins, President, DIRTT Environmental Solutions, at Arab Health.

What are the main areas of interest for DIRTT?

The value proposition is: speed, customisation, cost-competitive. Everything we do is based on the platform of our ICE@ technology. For many of our clients who build out spaces conventionally, the challenge is quality - getting materials and labour to site on schedule - typical construction challenges.

We are seeing in healthcare a big push to integrate DIRTT technology and its flexibility for change, as healthcare clients recognise that we don't know what the future holds, with technology changing so fast. We have completed ten major healthcare projects in the Middle East region, predominantly in Saudi Arabia, including a neonatal unit in Mecca. We have built out hospital rooms with 471 beds so far, and we have repeat customers, for example the Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia and private hospitals in the United States (Sloan-Kettering, Mercy Hospital - Ohio) and Canada. We have also worked on clinic rooms and eye centres. We are working on the challenges of metal in the frame before we move to operation rooms, clean rooms and radiology.

DIRTT has a very strong environmental focus. Please tell us more.

For us the environmental focus is on multiple levels. This is big for North America! The European construction industry has embraced manufactured solutions, and now North America is finally seeing that manufactured is not lower quality - it is generally better quality and less waste. DIRTT has taken things even further, because our software optimises everything so there is a lot less waste.

DIRTT offers what I call Wow - Win - Deliver. The Wow is using 3D video game technology to fly through your space. While are you doing that it is using all that data and the same type of computer code used by the video game industry, so you can make real-time changes in the 3D, which also changes the 2D and changes your CAD programs - all live. For a typical CAD program, the user has to have product knowledge. With ICE, you just draw a line and then another line, it will put the appropriate connector. It will not allow you to specify something that is physically not possible.

If you make changes everybody is working on the same dataset and real-time pricing feedback. The last piece of all of that data - the code - is also fed to our manufacturing machines automatically. To our knowledge DIRTT's is the only software in the world, and it's patented, that does everything off one core piece of data, so you can make changes everywhere. Anecdotally having worked for some big companies in the U.S., where they used to have projects that would take two to three months, DIRTT does it in three weeks. From an environmental standpoint that saves onsite labour and trash - the project arrives on site clean. It has future flexibility and reconfigurability. For example, our booth here at Arab Health will be dismantled and will be operational in our permanent showroom in Dubai.

You mention DIRTT's flexibility to be re-designed - do you have any examples?

It is a rare situation where you take everything apart, but it has happened. For example AutoTrader, the online company, moved buildings, and took with them 8 floors of DIRTT installations. A lot of time what happens is that our clients might reconfigure walls, for example to put in a television screen or repurpose it with murals for a paediatrician's waiting area. We have been called Lego on steroids. We give the architects and the facility managers, doctors and nurses - all those key users - custom-designed space for their needs. They understand their space better than anybody. DIRTT doesn't have a product catalogue. It is all online, it's designed for the client. The future of many industries is using

technology to deliver that custom experience and shrink the lead time.

In healthcare we are continually learning. For example, my children were born in the middle of the night, so I slept in a chair and thought, "Why can't we have a bed as part of the wall making up the hospital room?" And we have it as a pull-down unit that folds up into the wall. It's also ideal for a palliative care unit. With DIRTT's plug-and-play system you have the integration with the technology in the wall for charting for example. No more TV units hanging down with hard to sterilise surfaces. We don't have anything on the floor or around it.

HealthManagement promotes management and leadership in healthcare. Can you tell us about DIRTT's management structure and do you have a top management tip?

DIRTT's management team is very flat. On my business card you won't see any title. It is kind of an irony that we build walls and nobody has an office; we're very open. One thing that I am proud of is that when I became president of the company, I gave up my desk. I travel a lot, so my backpack is my office.

The total head count of the company is 850 and they are highly empowered. We get a lot of ideas from our team, from our shop floor and we feed everybody lunch every day. We call ourselves DIRTT bags and we do it with a smile, we do it with a little cheekiness – that's who we are.

We do lounge night every Thursday and we do it on Thursday on purpose, because people's weekends are theirs. It's nice to share some time with co-workers.

Can you single out a career highlight?

I would choose two. Our technology is what excites me most, because it is different. I think construction has been very slow to adapt the technology, I think its ripe for disruption.

The other highlights was DIRTT's Initial Public Offering (IPO) in November 2013. It was a lot of work getting ready for that. What was the most successful part of going public for us is that because we manufacture office space, hospital and clinic rooms, anybody we talk to even in the investment community could become our client. So it was a great way to get the DIRTT brand out there.

If you had not chosen this career path, what would you have become?

A teacher. When I graduated from university I backpacked overseas and ended up teaching English to children in Taiwan, which was a great experience.

Do you have a favourite quotation – or a motto that you live by?

For DIRTT I do. If I meet somebody in an airplane I like to ask them, "Have you ever done a renovation or construction project at your office or home? If you have there are three things I guarantee: it was late, it cost you more then you thought and that quality was nowhere near what you hoped for. That is what DIRTT is trying to change.

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