



EXCLUSIVE: Oohology finalizes site for 'Oohtopia,' its new interactive Louisville HQ

🔑 SUBSCRIBER CONTENT:

Dec 7, 2016, 1:08pm EST

Louisville web design and creative branding agency Oohology LLC has finalized the site for Oohtopia, a new Louisville headquarters that co-founder and executive creative director Mark Palmer said will be unlike anything Louisville has seen.

The company — which specializes in branding, marketing, web design and development and creative — has signed a lease to take the entire third floor of a multistory office building at 908 S. Eighth St. owned by Louisville-based construction firm Lichtefeld Inc. The targeted move-in date is April 1.

The company is relocating its 40 Louisville employees into the new space from a three-story building it leases at 1236 S. Shelby St. in the Shelby Park area. BTW Ventures LLC of Louisville purchased the building from Prism Development Inc. for nearly half a million dollars earlier this year.

Chuck Burke, chief operating officer for Oohology, said the firm is bursting at the seams inside the 10,000-square-foot building it has called home for about seven years. The company actually started out on the first floor, but has gradually taken over the entire three floors.

Burke said the company still loves the space but said the second floor is converted apartment units and not conducive to an office environment. The new owners also have plans to redevelop part of the building, he said.

Enter Oohtopia, a project that Palmer is extremely passionate about, noting that the 11,700-square-foot space will be the front door of the brand and shouldn't be outfitted with drab walls, fluorescent lighting and dog-eared old copies of People magazine in the foyer.

Oohology's current office would be considered modern by most standards, with funky lounge space full of brightly colored furniture and decor and glass-walled offices made out of whiteboard material. As you walk through the space, most of those glass walls are covered with drawings.

But Palmer insists that the space illustrates just a fraction of what the company represents as a troublemaker and "delightful disruptor" within the creative branding and advertising world. Plainly put, it



STUDIO MAYO ARCHITECTS

Oohology LLC's new headquarters will include a lounge area with a digital menu board and a the company's logo, created out of coffee cups on a rack.

lacks the wow factor the company is now demanding.

"We want clients to walk through Oohology and say 'what just happened?' in a good way," Palmer said.

Burke chimed in and said he "wants people to come through there and want to work here."

So what will Oohtopia entail?

As people walk through the doors, they will be greeted by a cafe and large lounge area where you can order coffee, bourbon or other drinks depending on your mood, Palmer said. The cafe will include a digital menu board and a large Oohology logo made out of a rack of coffee cups. It also will house an elevated stage that can be used by many of the musicians on staff, Burke said.

Palmer said he envisions the cafe as a place where the firm can host lunch-and-learn events, parties or other events for clients, noting it can comfortably seat around 70. Across from the cafe will be a multipurpose area that could be used to stage augmented or virtual reality exhibits for clients or be used as classroom, meeting or collaborative space.

Palmer said Oohology intends to launch a new program called Skoohl in which they teach kids on weekends, likely in the summer, the ins and outs of design and creative development to get them active in the business at an earlier age.

To the right of the cafe is a walkway bleeding into a collaborative meeting and workspace area that will include artificial turf — some flat and some sculpted mounds for seating — and personal offices that will include gridded glass walls that will promote a collaborative co-working atmosphere, Palmer said. The office also is being outfitted with sound-deadening felt wall panels and walls coated in whiteboard paint. A large meeting room has two-way mirrors surrounding it.

There also will be smaller meeting rooms — one of which will be used as a pitch room for clients that will be outfitted with modular augmented and virtual reality equipment.

"Have gun, will travel," Palmer said.

Logistically, the new space is minutes away from downtown and Interstate 64, a bonus. The company also is investing in collaborative software that will allow it to stage presentations and show off designs to out-of-town clients electronically.

Locally, Oohology works with some of the area's heavyweights on branding, web, marketing and design, including 21c Museum Hotels, the Kentucky Derby Museum and the Louisville Slugger Museum & Factory.

Burke and Palmer declined to disclose the company's investment into the new headquarters, saying only that it is "astronomical" and a reflection of their utmost confidence in the success of the idea.

By Palmer's thinking, there's no room for fear, and if you're scared by your own ideas, you should quit the business and work for someone.

"The only game you win standing still is hide and seek," Palmer said, with Burke saying they have no desire to hide.

Lichtefeld Inc. is building the space out to Oohology's specifications, a collaboration with Louisville-based Studio MAYO Architects. Burke said the company's costs are capitalized as part of the long-term lease, the

terms of which were not disclosed.

Oohology's new office space is part of a recalibration of the brand that will entail Oohology outlining specifically how they have helped companies raise their games creatively.

Palmer said other local companies aped their design style when they moved into the Shelby Park space and even trumped them with their spaces. But now they're upping the ante and daring others to take risks of their own.

"You're going to have to spend a lot of money and a lot of imagination to beat us," he said. "We're competitive by nature."

Marty Finley

Reporter

Louisville Business First

