

## This San Francisco Firm Is Poised for 100% Hoteling. But It Needs Technology to Make It Work

*As Farella Braun + Martel prepares to eliminate fixed offices, it's turned to a technology startup to help manage the transition.*

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### What You Need to Know

- Farella Braun + Martel is moving to one-third of its current space next year, with plans to use hoteling to accommodate all workers.
- The firm founded a new technology vendor, Maptician, to execute its hoteling plans.
- One selling point was the opportunity for personnel to look at a map of the space along with photos before selecting where to reserve an office.

The switch to hoteling doesn't just entail a philosophical shift away from the tried-and-tested model of permanently assigned offices for all attorneys. It also requires a technological shift to make it work.

Take Northern California midsize firm Farella Braun + Martel, which recently made the decision to eliminate fixed offices when it moves in mid-2023 to a space that's less than one-third the size of its current 125,000 square feet.

The rationale for the change is twofold, according to real estate partner Tony Ratner, who's overseeing the transformation. Recognizing the reality that most attorneys will only be coming into the office once or twice a week, a vastly consolidated floor plan is the only way to ensure that visits take place in a vibrant and energetic environment. And it also allows the firm to meet sustainability goals by tailoring office space to what's actually used.

"Only with hoteling can we achieve the right size and the sense of sustainability that we wanted from our new space," Ratner said.



But to avoid a future free-for-all when it comes to claiming offices—with newly onboarded personnel already sharing workspaces—the 115-attorney firm also needs outside help in managing the new system. An existing provider that helped the firm manage conference room setups and registrations would not be up to snuff, according to Jordon Flato, the firm's director of technology.

"It was an absolute nonstarter," he said, declining to name the company.

So Phyllis Medler, director of facilities and business services, went to vet a potential replacement, landing on space and occupancy management technology startup Maptician, which is making a run at the legal marketplace. One key selling point was the opportunity for personnel to look at a map of the space along with photos before selecting where to reserve an office.

“I wanted something that people wouldn’t be afraid of: they could just open the mobile app or web app,” Medler said. “It’s simple and easy to use without all the bells and whistles.”

And the maps will be particularly helpful when the firm takes up space on just two floors, with a wider floor plan than its current space. The firm’s new office is at 1 Bush St. in San Francisco’s financial district.

But with the firm already using Maptician, the attorneys appreciate the autonomy of being able to reserve spaces without having to contact the reception desk, according to Medler, and some have already given up their permanently assigned offices in order to avail themselves of more desirable spaces on a different floor when they do go into the office.

“On a technical level, Maptician is easy to work with,” Flato added. “I like to work with smaller, hungry companies growing their feature set, not larger ones that have been acquired three times and can barely support their mountain of features.”

For Maptician chief operating officer AshLea Allberry, the work on behalf of Farella Braun has sharpened the company’s ability to sell to the legal industry.

“We’re a young, hungry company that’s building alongside law firms,” she said.

One element of this is cooperating with ambivalent firms on pilot projects. “The pilot really matters,” Allberry said. “You don’t want to pilot with an old-school location where all the partners don’t like technology.”

Of course, for the Farella Braun work, the real test will come in 2023, when the firm has relocated. In addition to the challenge of hoteling, Flato is relying on Maptician and one of its business partners to manage its conference rooms. These will need to be without “presence bias”—giving remote attendees and internal attendees the ability to communicate equivalently.

“It’s going to be a challenging run, but I look forward to having them in on the process,” he said.