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The urban appeal: Sneaker companies making way to city - by Matthew Guarracino

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For years, the thriving Massachusetts athletic footwear industry – led by Reebok, New Balance, and Converse – favored traditional headquarters, surrounded on the outside by parking lots and dominated on the inside by 20th century décor, closed-door offices, cubicles and the like. Today, however, we are seeing a different trend.

At a time when companies are in dire need of attracting young talent, the footwear industry has moved out of the office park and into some of Boston’s popular neighborhoods building lively, open, trendy office space to scoop up millennial workers who in turn bring fresh, new ideas to the challenges these companies face in a competitive, youthful market.

Reebok’s recent Seaport opening follows New Balance’s move to the bustling new Boston Landing development in Allston and Converse’s shift to the fast-changing North Station area. Both Reebok and Converse left long-time suburban headquarters in their efforts to tap into a highly skilled millennial workforce that is at the forefront of the healthy lifestyle associated with the athletic footwear industry. These moves help bring companies closer to their consumers and also represent an opportunity to re-imagine the modern workplace.

Reebok’s new facility, which replaces the Canton office it opened in 2000, brings 700 workers to the Seaport’s Innovation and Design building. The facility features plenty of open space and natural lighting, and its white, black and gray tones throughout the office space give a modern and innovative feel to the former warehouse building. The five-story, 220,000 s/f headquarters also offers a number of amenities including a two-story gym, a mile-long running track around the building, a retail store and more – it has been named the “Home of Fitness.” In this way, Reebok has found another way to attract a new workforce of millennials that supports their brand as both an experience and a lifestyle choice.

Similarly, last year New Balance set up a home in Allston for its expanded new world headquarters, as part of the burgeoning mixed-use development Boston Landing. The new headquarters features communal workspace, direct views of Boston, and was designed in a modern fashion to foster a

collaborative environment for the millennial worker. With the open floor plan and the electronic and digital engagement available to its employees, New Balance was able to create a workplace that is attractive to the new generation of hires in the city looking to work for a brand that fits their way of life.

In April 2015, Converse moved its corporate headquarters, and 500-person workforce, from North Andover to Boston's North Station area. They occupy 214,000 s/f of office space at Lovejoy Wharf, near TD Garden and close to both commuter rail and the T. The 10-story office's full glass windows and its outdoor decks provide a dynamic view of the waterfront and the Charles River. The building itself celebrates the company's creative culture by combining its original old brick walls with a new open design concept. It also has an open atrium complete with a central staircase connecting all floors. A 3,500 s/f Converse store is located right at LoveJoy Wharf as well, in addition to a Converse Rubber Tracks recording studio.

By incorporating each of the modern design elements of the building and office space, as well as the retail store and recording studio, Converse was able to create a modish, creative work environment that represents the Converse brand and attracts creative talent. And in the process Converse reinforces a key region of local neighborhood revitalization.

The desire from Massachusetts shoe companies to shift their corporate jobs into the city and create state-of-the-art office spaces should likely continue, as more companies seek to tap Boston's rich educational and cultural resources. This allows large corporations to compete with other companies and startups in the city by embracing employees' preference to live, work and play within the same general vicinity.

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