

RPM Brings Fox Firm Full Circle

By Joe Clements
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BOSTON—Companies often change their name to reflect a new approach or service, but the opposite is true for the erstwhile Fox Relocation, which is marking its 20th anniversary being recast as Fox RPM Corp. Founder Gretchen Fox had mulled the idea over for an extended period, she explains, ultimately determining that her firm was being incorrectly "pigeon-holed" in the role of hired mover of non-residential operations.

"The term 'relocation' became something of a hindrance," Fox tells GlobeSt.com in a recent interview. "It doesn't begin to describe the full scope of what we do." The operation she launched at the dawn of the professional relocation industry has evolved to offer a soup-to-nuts menu for clients, a diverse constituency including corporations of all ilk; academic, artistic and health-related institutions; and entities as diverse as baseball's Washington Nationals and the Newseum, a 250,000-sf homage to media that was moved from Virginia to Washington, D.C. in 2005. The "R" shows relocation remains a big part of the firm's identity, says Fox, but "PM" reflects that project management is also high on the play list.

"We have been doing project management for years, but we are just not as well-known for it," says Fox, who estimates that arena presently makes up about 35% to 40% of her company's book of business. Fox is hiring more construction and project managers as the firm ramps up to service an expanding footprint that now extends down the east coast and into Puerto Rico. Fox has more than 100 projects underway and has handled assignments in 42 states, often repeat ventures on behalf of loyal clients such as Harvard University, Sovereign Bank and Staples. The company has about five dozen employees, and Fox says she anticipates a 10% increase in staff over the near term, and a spike of 50% to 100% in the ensuing years.

Initially focused on Greater Boston, Fox now has offices in Providence, RI; New York City and Washington, D.C. The expansion into Washington occurred earlier this decade when New England suffered an economic downturn, prompting Fox to begin pursuing projects for government agencies. "We've done well with it," says Fox. While that sector can be a complex process, the company's detail-oriented DNA has been a benefit in working through the arduous application process, she says, and such work now accounts for about 15% of the firm's business. "It just keeps

rolling along," she says of the demand for assistance among government agencies and related organizations.



Fox

Fox has broadened its horizons in other ways, making sure to be on top of the sustainability design trend and embracing new technologies as a way to create further efficiencies and services for customers. Several clients, for example, have embraced its proprietary software system, FoxFMS, a web-based facilities management system incorporating the firm's 20-year history in the industry. "One of the best selling points is that it is easy to use, and it can also be a nice introduction to a client," says Fox, noting that several customers are even using the program for day-to-day facilities management needs.

Despite the recent economic slowdown, Fox reports that her company is "as busy as ever," and says she is satisfied that the firm now has an identity matching the capabilities of Fox staffers. The firm is also not abandoning move management by any means, she stresses, as exemplified in the recently completed relocation of Boston legal giant Bingham McCutchen LLP to One Federal St. in the Financial District. The daunting 315,000-sf initiative required nearly nine months of preparation to pull off, but Fox says the effort proved successful in the end.

The Bingham McCutchen project also speaks to her company's legacy, with Fox first learning the relocation trade in the 1980s when she managed five law firms that all moved during her tenure. Matching her skill sets developed through those experiences, Fox set out to prove there was a need for third-party assistance in performing such duties, an instinct that has proven correct in the ensuing 20 years as several new competitors have come to the fore, including commercial real estate service firms such as CB Richard Ellis and Jones Lang LaSalle.

As for the name change, Fox says she believes it does enhance the firm's competitive edge. The RPM acronym standing for "revolutions per minute" incorporates a more subliminal message, she offers—that of a company constantly on the go. "It has many connotations that fit us very well," says Fox, adding, "We have had a tremendous amount of positive feedback."

