

# An Expert's Guide to Operable Walls

By Matt Watson

**With the demand for flexible commercial office space on the rise,** the market for operable wall systems has responded with technological innovations and a wider range of options than ever. “Movable walls are fundamental to creating a dynamic, flexible workspace,” says **Bryan Welch**, managing director at **Modernfold, Inc.**, the world’s largest producer of operable walls.

Trends in the commercial real estate market—from telecommuting to daylighting—have caused office tenants to rethink how they utilize and build out spaces. Modernfold has been well positioned to respond to these shifts. Founded in 1925, the firm helped pioneer the accordion wall partition for schools and churches. In 1939 its movable walls were featured in model homes at the New York World’s Fair. “From there we transitioned to the commercial space, and our products have always set the bar for the industry,” Welch says.

By focusing on digitalization and responding to the needs of its large customer base, Modernfold today offers an extensive portfolio of operable walls. “Our mission has always been to make space solutions smart and easy,” Welch says. The company has helped transition the industry from manual partitions to fully automated systems, and continues to educate the market on the many benefits of operable walls.



The Modernfold DRS glass wall system offers dry glaze sidelite rails to match door profiles, plus a complete range of bottom rails to meet ADA requirements. This system is available with a sliding panel closure or a pivot panel closure.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF MODERNFOLD





## Why Movable Walls?

As companies across the corporate spectrum reduce the physical footprints of their offices, movable walls have become the go-to solution for commercial tenants looking for flexibility. The trend toward open office layouts has only increased the demand for operable wall solutions. “We really believe

the workspace needs to facilitate the success of the business or organization,” Welch says. “Their space needs to help them achieve their mission.”

Welch says several factors drive the move toward flexible workspaces. “For starters, space costs money. The more efficiently you’re using your workplace, the more you can reduce costs on unused space.” Environmental factors are also a driving force. “In terms of the energy used to heat, cool, and illuminate an office, a smaller, flexible space reduces the burden on the environment,” he adds.

In addition to the commercial office market, Welch says Modernfold

sees continued demand for its movable walls in schools, convention centers, large restaurants, and hotels. “In each of these verticals, flexibility is key to [an organization’s] success.”

### • Workplace Flexibility

Movable wall concepts give architects and interior designers the freedom to create a space that works for any client. “We view our movable wall products as the key to allow the configuration of the space to facilitate what’s going on in a given day,” Welch says. For example, if a company is having a large brainstorming session in the morning followed by small group breakaway sessions, Modernfold’s movable wall systems allow for a quick transition between multi-room setups. The partitions run on the firm’s SmartTrack® programmable suspension system, which offers two uniquely engineered solutions. The Switch & Curve® Smart Track provides multi-program capabilities that reduce setup costs and operational error, and is ideal for panels larger than 20 feet. For a grid pattern setup that utilizes shorter panels, the Right Angle track is the preferred solution.

### • Increased Acoustic Control

The reduction in space-per-employee in many offices means acoustic controls are more important than ever. “With workers often in close quarters today, the need for privacy has increased,” Welch says. “If you’re having a confidential conversation or taking an important client call, you’re going to need to be confident about the acoustics of your space.” Modernfold’s operable partition systems lead the industry in acoustic control without sacrificing aesthetic quality. In fact, the company’s best-selling product, the Acousti-Seal® Encore®, offers an unprecedented 56 STC, or sound transmission class—a metric for how well a partition impedes airborne sound. This makes it an ideal tool for creating quiet rooms or one-on-one meeting spaces.

### • Complete Automation

Modernfold’s lineup of fully automatic operable partitions and glass wall systems provides the most advanced

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF MODERNFOLD



Movable walls allow room sizes to be tailored to various events.





↙  
The DRS design also allows for snap-on covers, as well as on-site size adjustability and glass replacement.



a versatile tool for creating dynamic spaces that are both aesthetically pleasing and, with up to 51 STC, provide necessary acoustic controls in any workplace. The Acousti-Clear model can also be equipped with MorphGlas® technology, a polymer-dispersed liquid crystal that transforms the glass walls from clear to opaque with the click of a button.

## What are the Best Options for Movable Walls?

### • Operable Partitions

Equipped with their proprietary Acousti-Seal technology, which offers the highest level of acoustic control, Modernfold's operable partitions are the most versatile solution for interior space configuration. The firm's Paired Panel Systems, where panels are paired in groups of two for a quick and convenient setup, are well suited for creating flexible meeting spaces within an office setting. For complex layouts, Modernfold's Single Panel Systems provide a wide range of design possibilities. "You don't have to compromise to fit into your space," Welch says. "We equip you with the flexibility to work around any obstacle."

### • Glass Wall Systems

Movable glass wall systems are ideal for large offices where sunlight normally wouldn't reach the interior of the space. For those who plan on changing spatial configurations frequently, Modernfold's ComfortDrive® Automated Self-Driving Panel System allows users to pre-program a variety of positions under fully automatic control. For clients that require additional privacy in their space, the Acousti-Clear line of movable glass walls is available in three variations—motorized, automatic, and demountable. "Whatever your needs, the glass wall systems offer the added benefit of a clean, sleek aesthetic," Welch says. **gb&d**

technical solution available in the market. With the ability to pre-program a variety of layouts, users can rearrange a space to their needs at the touch of a button. "If you have a small group finishing a meeting in a room, and a larger group coming in next, the first group simply needs to hit a button and the wall will open and store itself, easily expanding the meeting space," Welch says. The system is conveniently operated through a user-friendly touchpad, while the sophisticated system automatically guides the panels into place.

### • What is Daylighting?

Daylighting is the illumination of interior spaces by natural light, with the goal of reducing energy use while

improving the aesthetics of the space. "Daylighting is becoming a bigger topic in commercial building design," Welch says. "Our customers want privacy while still allowing natural sunlight into a room." Because of this, commercial designers have gravitated toward the simplicity of glass movable wall solutions.

### • Versatile Glass Solutions

Modernfold's glass wall systems operate at the intersection of form and function, allowing daylight farther into the center of an office. Its Acousti-Clear® glass walls present architects and interior designers with

↙  
The Acousti-Clear Glass Wall Systems can be motorized, automatic, and demountable. You can use multiple Acousti-Clear products within the same space and add custom finishes.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF MODERNFOLD