

# Modular walls make remodeling simpler.



Banner Bank Building  
Boise, Idaho

**Boise, ID** — One recent Thursday, building maintenance manager Mike Murnighan found out from the building's landlord that he needed to turn an office into a bigger conference room and a conference room into two offices — all by the next Monday.

Murnighan smiled.

*"I'm just glad he has the confidence to give that to us,"* he said.

Murnighan oversees downtown Boise's Banner Bank Building, billed as the first speculative office building in the nation to achieve top-level green certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.

The Banner Bank Building is supergreen, in part because of its pioneering use of modular walls throughout most of its 180,000 square feet.

That means Murnighan and another maintenance engineer, Troy Schwager, can tear out bindings with their bare hands,

disconnect wall panels from their frames, unbolt panel fittings on the floors and ceilings and move them into a new configuration — all with minimal use of equipment and hardly any dust.



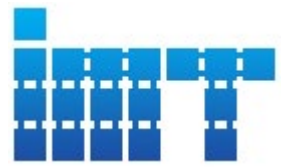
Murnighan said he and Schwager could get the Thursday-to-Monday project done in less than a day.

A bigger remodel under way in the same building involves the gutting and reconfiguring of an almost 5,000-square-foot space, which had been occupied by a title company, but soon will be occupied by an engineering firm.

Where the prior tenant had offices along the outer rim and cubicles clustered near the middle, the new tenant wants to flip the configuration, bringing in more light. A few offices will disappear in the transition, and a kitchen will move from one end of the space to another.

And with the walls moving, the wiring, networking and air vents have to move, too. These systems are worked into the raised floor covered by movable floor and carpet squares, allowing easy access for workers.





The remodel will take place in a two to three week span. Such a project in a traditional building might take six to eight weeks.



And one of the best parts, according to Murnighan and Schwager, is that waste will be minimal.

Beyond those advantages is cost over time. Gary Christensen, the Banner Bank Building's developer, laid out the numbers. He said Sheetrock costs about \$70 a foot, where a modular system goes for around \$150 to \$170 per foot.

*"You've got to look at the whole package,"* he said.



*"In a wall, it's not just Sheetrock partition. It's the sidelight window you put in. It's the door frame. It's the door hardware. It's all these things that go together."*

He said the initial build-out with a modular wall system costs the building owner \$40 to \$45 per square foot, where a comparable traditional build-out, with high-end finishes, might cost between \$40 and \$50 per square foot.

The cost savings show up in subsequent remodels.

**A gut rehabilitation of a space with the modular system Christensen uses costs him about \$8 per square foot, compared with \$20 to \$25 per square foot for a similar remodel with drywall.**

Christensen acknowledged the resistance to modular walls in the construction world.

*"Some subcontractors feel that there's not as much work for them, and it's true,"* he said.

*"But as a landlord, I'm not in the business of feeding electricians; I'm in the business of satisfying my tenants."*

He pointed out that the use of modular walls doesn't earn many points toward the USGBC's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design new construction certification, but it's still a green move.

*"It's part of the same ethic LEED develops in people,"* he said.

*"It's the ethic of reusing something, repurposing something."*

