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Sweetwater Invests Millions into Fort Wayne Campus

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COMMITTED to QUALITY and SUSTAINABILITY

How Sweetwater is Upgrading its Facilities to Attract Talent and Sustain Growth *By Jack Quigley*



Sweetwater, a world leader in music technology and instrument retail, continues to invest millions into their Fort Wayne campus to build state-of-the-art facilities designed to attract employees and sustain the company's rapid growth.

Built on a 100-plus-acre campus, Sweetwater's 450,000-square-foot core building houses offices, a music store, recording studios, a state-of-the-art performance theater, and the Sweetwater Academy of Music. The building also includes a restaurant, an arcade, and an employee fitness center.

This facility was one of the first in its region to be recognized by the U.S. Green Building Council as a 21st Century LEED-Certified Building, leading the way in combining state-of-the-art technology, rapid-renewal materials, and recycling – both during construction and in day-to-day operations.

"When people walk into our core corporate building here on campus and the music store, they are just blown away," said Doug Wood, Senior Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer at Sweetwater. "These are people who have traveled around the country and around the

world, and when they see the architecture of the building and our facilities, they say, 'Okay, now I get why you guys truly are the best and largest music retailer online: It's because you think about the details.' And when you see this building, it's about the details."

Increasing Capacity to Attract Talent

Sweetwater's new 40,000-square-foot music store is one of the largest music stores in the country. Construction of the new store left Sweetwater's previous 18,000-square-foot store empty, so the vacant area was converted into usable space for Sweetwater's e-commerce and web development teams.

Some of the previous store's unique design elements are maintained, while the building has an added capacity of 150 people.

"We keep talking about how when you walk through Sweetwater's campus, it doesn't look like any office building; well, this new space is going to be that on steroids," Wood said. "By doing a light renovation, we're getting a lot of bang for our buck and some much-needed growth capacity as we've grown by double digits again since last year."

"Sweetwater actually put \$4 million or \$5 million into the old store not too long ago, so we wanted to keep a lot of the ceiling configurations, skylights, and cool flooring transitions," Wood said. "We kept all those, and we're infilling with cubicles and offices but keeping the DNA of the old store alive."

Two years ago, Sweetwater invested almost \$52.5 million into building a 500,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art distribution center that allows the company to operate at maximum efficiency. With a sophisticated conveyer system and customized humidity controls, Sweetwater's distribution center is designed to increase operational efficiency and attract talent.

Unlike most warehouses that shiver with the weather and barely have insulation, Sweetwater's distribution center provides employees with some of the most comfortable environments of any warehouse in the U.S. The mezzanine, office spaces, cafeteria, stage, coffee bar, and 30,000-square-foot retail expansion, as well as the acoustically isolated music laboratories, marketing addition, training center, and employee wellness center with locker rooms and a salon, are all connected, comfortable, and designed to sound and work perfectly.

Sweetwater freed up 150,000 square feet of previous warehouse space with the new Distribution Center and designated those areas for future development to meet the needs of growing corporate and sales divisions.

Wood said he believes Sweetwater's continued investment into its campus makes the music retailer an employer of choice for the region and state.

"Coming through COVID-19, everybody knows that it has been difficult to find employees; there's an abundance of jobs and not enough employees out there. But Sweetwater really has not struggled to fill positions," Wood said. "Don't get me wrong – it is a lot of work to recruit. But we think it's because when people come see our campus, they really can see themselves working here for a long time because the campus is so unique and different."





Committing to Quality and Sustainability

Sweetwater's consistent growth meant the company needed an expanding line of networking equipment and distribution facilities with backup redundancies to ensure constant operation.

"It's paramount our HVAC system works everywhere in our building to keep the instruments and audio equipment we have safe from humidity and weather damage," said Matt Knipstein, Senior Director of Campus Facilities and Maintenance at Sweetwater. "We have to control humidification to around 40 to 45 percent, which is a challenge in the Midwest. Sweetwater stocks small equipment, instruments, and over 12,000 guitars that can warp, fray, degrade, or

get out of tune and arrive in customer's hands damaged."

HVAC units inside the new building run nearly silent, with distracting noises and hums obfuscated away from the sales engineers and their customers. Additionally, customized humidity controls within the distribution center create less than one degree of temperature difference between the ceiling and the floor, which are 50 feet apart.

Sweetwater constructed its campus from rapidly renewable and recycled materials while recycling 98 percent of materials from previous on-site buildings.

Sensors are installed throughout the buildings to respond to natural-light levels, allowing Sweetwater to maintain adequate lighting for production and effi-

cient use of electricity. Eighty percent of workstations on campus enjoy access to daylight and views to the outdoors. And, in many cases, motion-sensor controls allow lights to remain off when a room is unoccupied.

Air-monitoring systems designed to help sustain occupant health and comfort are integrated into Sweetwater buildings' mechanical systems. These systems regulate indoor air quality and introduce fresh air as necessary to flush out any contaminants that may be present.

Sweetwater restrooms employ water conservation – waterless urinals; low-flow, light-powered faucets with occupant sensors; and dual-flush toilets – that amounts to 54 percent savings in annual water usage. Water conservation elements

reduce the burden on municipal water supply and wastewater systems and contribute to water savings.

Using Facilities as a Strategic Opportunity

Sweetwater entered a unique financial partnership with Northeastern REMC powered by a parallel generator system designed by R.E. Dimond and Associates.

R.E. Dimond Vice President of Electrical Engineering Tim Hill worked alongside a vast team of electrical engineers and local and regional power and natural gas companies to install two massive natural gas parallel generators onsite for Sweetwater.

"Throughout the year, [Sweetwater] will get a call from Northeastern REMC to go off-grid," Knipstein said.

By utilizing rooftop solar, natural gas, onsite power storage, and distributed generation, industrial facilities like Sweetwater can help suppliers diversify power purchases. Sweetwater's new behind-the-meter generation system has reduced the utility's demand by 1,500 kilowatts, easing both power delivery demands and costs for Northeastern REMC while simultaneously providing a new revenue stream for Sweetwater.

"This parallel generator system allows us to run off the grid, saving them precious resources," Knipstein said. "And whatever power we're not using we push back to the grid."

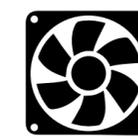
Equally important, according to Knipstein, is the newly installed redundant "fiber ring" of Internet networking that

circles Sweetwater's campus. The "ring" layout ensures no single device failure brings down everything in the line. Likewise, if an Internet service provider fails, a second ISP can be activated to pick up the bandwidth.

"And if something's not right, R.E. Dimond is always willing to jump in," Knipstein said. "They're one of the best consultants I've worked with in 15 years. I've called Tim when we had a problem in the distribution center where we lost power during one of the first times something happened, and none of us were familiar with it yet. We called Tim at 1 a.m., and he answered his phone and walked us through a fix."

R.E. Dimond and Associates, Inc. Consulting Engineers

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