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Cisco Acquisition, New SF Digs Reflect Collaboration Approach

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By Rachael King

Reporter

[Cisco Systems](#) Inc. CSCO +1.16% said Tuesday that it has acquired a startup called Collaborate.com to help further its next-generation collaboration strategy. The startup developed a mobile collaboration application that features unified document sharing, task management and team communication, [according to a Cisco blog post](#). The acquisition also allows Cisco to inherit a team of cloud and mobile software developers that fits in with the company's new approach to collaboration software.

By allowing Collaborate.com employees to work out of Cisco's San Francisco Innovation Center office, the company is hoping that its new acquisition can keep the startup fire going. The office, light years removed, culturally, from Cisco's sprawling headquarters in San Jose, channels a startup-vibe with an open floor plan, a fully stocked kitchen serving a free daily lunch and healthy snacks, and the requisite toys: skateboards, ping pong table and even a pair of unicycles. It's the most tangible evidence that Cisco is serious [about trying collaboration a little differently this time](#).



Cisco Systems Inc.

Cisco's San Francisco Innovation Center offices where the team from Cisco's newest acquisition, Collaborate.com, will work.

If the setting is less buttoned-up, so is Cisco's approach to collaboration, which Rowan Trollope, senior vice president and general manager of Cisco's collaboration technology group, almost describes as a live and let live approach. Basically he isn't happy how many collaboration systems are "walled gardens", requiring collaborators on both ends of the line to use the same software. "Our competitors view the

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walled gardens as value," he said, during a recent visit to Cisco's San Francisco office. Instead, Mr. Trollope is trying to build a system that can connect from any device to any device, across any network, using voice, video, text or other content between two or more people.

Cloud and mobile figure heavily in his strategy. The Collaborate acquisition brings to Cisco a team of cloud and mobile software developers.

One challenge for Cisco will be to make collaboration software both business-grade, and cost-effective, he said. To that end, he plans to capitalize [on a new cloud architecture code-named Cloud Fusion](#), that lets businesses choose where to put corporate data. They can either place it in the cloud or maintain control of it. In the latter scenario, companies buy new collaboration services from Cisco's cloud and then combine those services with software and hardware that resides on their own premises. It was designed by Cisco vice president and CTO Jonathan Rosenberg, the former chief technology strategist for Skype. Mr. Rosenberg joined Cisco in February.

The company says it uses the new office space at the edge of San Francisco Bay as a recruiting tool for attracting top programmers, many of whom prefer working in the city to commuting to Silicon Valley. As a result, some software developers get to sit facing the windows with a stunning view of the water and the Bay Bridge in the distance.

That view doesn't come cheap. The offices take up three floors of a building in San Francisco's Mission Bay neighborhood, with average asking rates per square foot at \$63.31, the highest in the city, [reported the San Francisco Business Times](#) in September. Cisco increased its leased space in September and now possesses about 180,000 square feet in the building.

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