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Office moving made easy & painless

. . from thinking about it . . through to un-packing on that 'ever so calm weekend' when you move painlessly !

- compiled by Mark Kolke **

Relocating any size business, even a two-person office, is a time-consuming job that requires careful planning. Many who have had to coordinate an office move would hesitate to wish such a fate on their worst enemies.

Much can be done to minimize the impact and trauma of the experience. Whether up the street, on the other side of the city or across the country, moving is a significant event in the life of any business. You probably won't move often, but when you do, there are several things you can do to make the 'major event' go as smoothly as possible. First, as you consider relocating your offices, make a list of the pros and cons so you and your staff clearly understand the underlying need for the move and what it should accomplish. Other factors that should be considered are the timing of the move, the expense, employee relocation (if any), and minimizing downtime and lost production. When is the best time to move? Are there seasonal fluctuations or other considerations that could affect this decision? How much will the move cost, and what percentage are you and your staff going to do yourselves? How will this relocation impact the employees, and what effect will it have on overall productivity? These questions need to be addressed during the earliest planning phases.

Having a "MOVE LEADER" and "MOVE CAPTAINS" at least three months before the actual relocation is a good idea. I recommend selecting people to manage specific areas such as new office furniture and equipment, electronics and communication, color coding, plants, decorating, morale, employee relocation (if needed), and budget. Often several of these responsibilities can be given to one person, but make sure each of these areas is assigned to someone.

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Managing the move budget is a critical activity. It is a good idea to make area managers responsible for their individual budgets, subsequently funneling their expenses to the budget manager. However you organize your move team, whether it consists of one person or 20, the issues and decisions are similar. Depending on the scale, moving can be expensive, and unforeseen expenses tend to be the rule, rather than the exception. At the same time, there are ways you can judiciously save money. Allow enough time to thoughtfully weigh your options.

Plan, Plan, Plan

Most moving disasters usually result from poor planning. Even in the best planned moves, something inevitably goes wrong. For these reasons, I strongly recommend involving the entire staff in the relocation process, from the original decision to the open house. Employee input opens the door to more creative solutions during every step of the move, while also increasing morale and productivity among the staff.

Preparing for a move is the perfect time to purge obsolete paperwork, archive old records to offsite storage, and get rid of other materials you really don't need any more. Allow plenty of time for this step, as it always takes longer than you anticipate. An added benefit is that the more you throw away or send to remote storage, the more you end up saving on moving expenses. A move prompts many companies to upgrade their telephone system and computer network, or at least plan for future upgrades.

Because changes in technology have driven down prices, smaller firms can now afford equipment with enhanced capacity and more features for greater productivity. However, as additional features also mean more potential problems, be sure your moving plan provides for advance installation and testing. Even if you are downsizing your office rather than relocating, you might investigate the benefits of changing your phone and computer networks.

Deciding about office furniture is also part of the relocation process. In addition to buying new, you should think about refurbishing existing furniture or looking at used. Even panel systems are available on the secondhand market. If you decide to get rid of your old furniture, consider donating to charity rather than trying to sell it. It's far less trouble, and you can get a nice tax deduction.

With proper planning and the involvement of all your employees, a move can be a valuable exercise in building intra-office teamwork and improving morale and communications. The experience, while admittedly a lot of work, will also provide a break in the routine, and a chance to work together to solve the numerous problems that are an integral part of any move. Because relocation is going to divert people from their regular responsibilities to some degree, you will need to establish a balance between the move and getting the work done.

Many resources exist to aid you including relocation consultants, space planners and architects, other small businesses, moving companies and even insurance firms. You will need to contact your insurance agency to provide information on your new address, and make sure that any risks which could arise from the move itself are properly covered. Consider hiring some casual labor to clean up the old space, and help pack and unpack in the new location.

With careful advance planning, most small businesses manage to move without drastic interruptions in delivering the products or services they market, and many relocate without closing down at all. One hint is to pack everything except the items needed for the immediate job at hand before the move. Those key items are the last packed and the first unpacked at the new location.

Every company undoubtedly has some unique requirement that necessitates special advance planning. If you are working with a moving company, it is the best source of strong boxes, and the most economical method is to rent them. The fee is nominal, and the moving company delivers the boxes a month before your move, and picks them up after you've unpacked. The company will also supply color-coded labels, and help you work out a labeling system. Be sure to precisely label everything, from boxes to furniture and equipment. Color coding by destination helps ensure that items get delivered to their proper place at the new location.

Selecting A Moving Company

If you only have a small amount to move, seriously consider renting a truck and doing it yourself, or enlisting the help of some hired laborers. In that case, make sure your insurance covers this kind of activity, in terms of both worker's compensation and liability. Other options include hiring a professional major office moving company or a smaller, independent firm, depending on your specific requirements. The best way to find a qualified mover who fits your needs is to obtain referrals from companies similar to yours, or from independent advisers such as moving consultants or space planners. [check the links on <http://www.calgaryofficespace.com/>]

You should be sure to interview the companies and their references and confirm the scope of their insurance coverage. Moving companies can also be valuable resources in terms of your overall moving plan, as well as some of the details. For example, if you have to move an office panel system, the moving company can sometimes give you a better deal on disassembly and reassembly than the original panel supplier.

Moving Day!

After an enormous amount of planning, packing, decision-making, labeling and consolidation, the fateful day finally arrives. **Remain calm ! and flexible !**

To lessen disruption and avert customer service problems, consider scheduling the move after business hours, or closing down the operation for a day. Make sure you have adequate staff on hand to oversee the move itself (at both the old and new locations), and to field the inevitable questions that will arise.

If you are moving complex equipment with numerous interconnecting cables, leave cables attached wherever possible. Tape cords and cables to the appliances they serve, rather than boxing them, to avoid searching and frustration after the equipment is unpacked for reassembly.

After The Move

After you finally have everything under your new roof, there is still much work to be done. During the planning phase, establish a timeline for resuming normal operations in the new location. If you don't plan the moving process to completion and people stop before everything is unpacked, it will seem, in retrospect, as if the relocation took far longer than it actually did to complete. For many businesses, a move can provide valuable public relations and marketing opportunities. For example, open houses, grand openings and kick-off sales can reinforce existing relationships with clients and vendors while also attracting new customers. Planning such events to coincide with the completion timeline will also help ensure that the schedule is met, and when that happens, you'll really have something to celebrate.

Basic Pre- Moving Checklist

- 1) Complete negotiations with future Landlord using an excellent leasing agent !
- 2) Select a moving consultant and/or moving company.
- 3) Reserve new phone numbers, or arrange to transfer existing ones, with the phone company. [**be mindful of deadline dates for white & yellow page listings**]
- 4) Prepare artwork for announcement letter, business cards, stationery and envelopes.
- 5) Get change of address cards from the post office, or create your own.
- 6) Make appointments with the utility companies for cut offs and new hookups.
- 7) Schedule phone installation.
- 8) Design new office space, including use of old furniture or purchase of new furniture. Discuss plans with employees and solicit their input.
- 9) Establish criteria for purging files and throwing out old materials.
- 10) Have custom wiring installed for telephone/computer networks.
- 11) Inform current customers of the move, visiting some in person, where appropriate.
- 12) Arrange for extra help to pack, clean and unpack.

Now, before taking a Valium, read on to see some step by step processes that will make the process easier and leave a minimal number of items forgotten:

Suggested Timeline for a large move....[smaller one require less time], but best not to leave out any steps . . .

[Guidelines / instructions for Management & MOVE LEADER]

Eight months prior to move:

Appoint a person responsible for all phases of the move.

If you have not finalized your lease negotiation, it is a good idea to engage both a space planner/interior designer and a moving company or moving consultant.

Appoint one department coordinator for each department.

Finalize selection of finishes, carpet and window coverings for new premises.

Order furniture.

Seven months prior to move:

Make a complete inventory of all furniture moving to the new location.

Determine the number of employees moving.

Four months prior to move:

Advise the facility managers of both buildings about the move in writing.

Refinish all furniture that doesn't meet minimum requirements.

Order any additional or replacement equipment/machines necessary in new quarters.

Two months prior to move:

Call your selected moving company to arrange a walk through.

Six weeks prior to move:

Divide floors into two or three sections (east & west, etc.) and assign color coded labels to each section.

Number each office.

Five weeks prior to move:

Arrange with building manager for exclusive use of elevators during move-in.

Check building regulations to see if a certificate of insurance is required.

Four weeks prior to move:

Order cartons for use during move.

Arrange a pre-move meeting with your selected moving company to discuss all aspects of the move.

Three weeks prior to move:

Meet with all department coordinators to advise them of final plans and review the services at new location including parking, move schedule, etc.

Two weeks prior to move:

Label all furniture and equipment with the proper color-coded label and numbers.

One week prior to move:

Install directional signs in your new office space.

Day of move:

Move coordinator should be on site.

Post move:

If requested, your moving company can rearrange furniture and remove empty boxes.

Getting Ready for the Move - Out

[Guidelines / instructions for staff]

Cleaning

By now, you should have almost finished sorting and cleaning your files and storage areas, leaving only the materials that you are taking to the new office. If this is not the case, PLEASE GET STARTED!! You don't have much time left.

Packing

You are responsible for your own packing. The Move Captains will distribute tags with your name and your new room assignment. These tags are to mark your boxes, furniture, and computer equipment. If you need extra move labels, please see your Move Captain. Be sure to mark these labels with your new room assignment.

Cartons

Be sure that your boxes are properly assembled. If you need help with assembly, ask!!

Leave two inches at the top of each box for easy closure.

TIP: Label each box so you'll know immediately what's inside.

Please tag your boxes and computer equipment as shown in the attached illustration.

Proper tagging ensures that your belongings will not be lost.

You may wish to pack an "OPEN ME FIRST" box that holds your desktop items and supplies.

Desk

Seal small items such as paperclips, pencils, and other loose materials, etc. into envelopes before packing them in cartons.

Pack the contents of your desk, including all working papers, letter trays, books and other desktop items.

Filing Cabinets

TIP: Pack and label the contents of each drawer.

Tag your boxes on the END of each box; the movers stack them on dollies and cannot see the tags if they're on the top.

Vertical file cabinets can stay full.

Lateral file cabinets need to be unpacked.

Supply or Storage Cabinets

Pack all contents in cartons.

Cabinet doors should be locked, taped, or tied.

Bookcases

Remove all contents and pack in cartons.

Remove all shelves and stack them near the bookcase; label each shelf and bookcase.

Remove the shelf brackets, place them in an envelope, and tape it to the back of the bookcase.

Coat Racks or Lockers

Pack all items and properly mark boxes.

Office Machines (computers, printers, scanners, fax machines, photocopiers etc.)

Do NOT pack these machines...the mover will do this!

Leave all machines on top of their desks or stands.

Equipment should all be in 'travel mode' with all cords unfastened and disconnected.

Disconnect all equipment.

Label each individual piece of equipment.

Pictures, Maps, and Bulletin Boards

Tag each individual piece.

If the item does not fit in a carton, keep picture on wall, and the mover will handle it.

Consolidate small items and cushion them with packing material such as newspaper.

Telephones

DO NOT PACK YOUR TELEPHONES. Before you leave on moving day, unplug your phone & make sure the phone is labeled.

Chair Pads

If you wish to take your chair pad, please make sure that it is tagged; if you DON'T want it, notify your Move Captain.

Electronic File Clean-Up

If you have time . . . why not ?

A good rule: IF YOU USE IT, KEEP IT; IF YOU DON'T DELETE IT.

Computer Equipment

Do NOT pack any PC equipment in boxes!

Please label EACH PIECE of computer equipment that will go to your office. This includes: monitor, processor, modem, hard drive, mouse, printers, etc.

Individuals should be responsible for their own laptop.

Things for everyone to check once you THINK you are fully packed & move-ready !

Is your desk empty?

Are your supply cabinets cleared?

Are all wall items labeled?

Are breakable items properly packed?

Are your printers and other equipment in 'travel mode' ?

Is the equipment in your office disconnected?

Have you backed up computer data?

Are your computer components properly disconnected and labeled?

Are the "Do Not Move" tags placed?

Are all liquids drained from your equipment?

Are your desk pads and chair pads tagged?

Is everything tagged properly or marked?

Is the condition of your furniture and equipment carefully checked and recorded?

Are labels placed in a visible area?

Are all shelves on the bookcases labeled, are pegs removed and packed in a box?

Is your office floor plan complete?

Are your office doors marked?

Are the diagrams of the offices posted at your new location?

THE Move – In !

Your first concern will be to unpack and get settled. When you've unpacked, please break down your cartons and take them to the elevator lobby.

Damage Claims

Although the mover will exercise extreme care in moving your materials, some damage may still occur. Prior to establishing a claim, you, your supervisor, and your Move Captain must be familiar with the condition of the furniture or equipment to ensure that the damage occurred during the move. If there is damage, please notify your Move Captain, who will handle it. If you need extra "trouble/damage forms" see your Move Captain.

Lost and Found

Any unidentified items will be placed in the lost and found. If you miss anything, please check there.

Movers

Some staff from your moving company will be on - site after the move to shift furniture, hang white board, etc. The boxes will be removed, so please be sure to be completely unpacked by then.

Computer Problems

If you have any problems, please note them on your move check-in sheet and give them to your Move Captain. Information System will handle problems on a first - come, first - served basis.

**** [This piece is compiled from notes I've collected over many years – original sources long forgotten. I apologize for any failure to attribute sources. I encourage users of this article to provide me with ideas for improvement. Feedback is always welcome.]**

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