


MEDIA COVERAGE

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office premises



Moving on

Moving offices is an opportunity to reassess your storage, procurement, technology and utility arrangements to ensure your business is equipped to face the future. **Adrian Holliday** outlines the key issues to consider both before and after that stressful move

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< leasing or renting a conventional office with its lengthening list of capital expenditure needs: furniture, carpeting, IT cabling and maintenance bills.


Part of the service

According to Nick Wood, chief executive of Regus UK, one advantage for small companies is that they are able to move in and concentrate on their business right away. "Everything from consumables including fax toner, tea and coffee to capital spent on furniture and associated fit-out costs will be taken care of," he explains. "Once a small firm moves in it only pays for the services it uses, whether it's work-ready offices; a meeting room by the hour, half-day or full-day; or services such as videoconferencing, PA and admin support; as well as call and mail-handling."

Dixon also suggests the serviced office route means companies are spared the cost of keeping up with developments in new technology. "Leading serviced and managed office suppliers have the latest in

IT and communications so their clients can immediately capitalise on state-of-the-art technology and benefit from ongoing developments and upgrades," he adds. "There's no need to invest in IT and less need for specialist IT staff, which reduces IT expenditure."

As for cost-savings, Regus claims the serviced office occupier can potentially expect to save up to 50% during three years in terms of overall cost of occupancy; figures that are backed up by the Chartered Institute of Purchasing.

Deciding which type of office – and the physical and technological infrastructure that goes with it – is right for you is no easy matter. But it's worth taking the time to consider your existing and future needs in terms of storage, technology and energy consumption, as well as how much time you can realistically devote to chasing up tens or hundreds of suppliers. After all, just like when you move house, you're probably going to want to stay put for some time to come. 

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Cost-cutter: how to keep expenses down

- Consider using a utilities comparison cost-saving website such as makeitcheaper.com. Rather like uswitch.com, makeitcheaper.com is an independent supermarket for businesses that compares costs for electricity, gas, water, mobiles, landlines, broadband and insurance contracts. Free to use, it earns its fees from suppliers for introducing new customers. The service claims it makes businesses fully aware of any obligations relating to a contract so they shouldn't be caught out by a supplier's small print
- There are a number of new green initiatives that are good for the environment but could also you money, suggests Michael Howard, chairman of Maris Interiors LLP in south London. "New lighting systems can be installed that detect movement in a room and switch off automatically when the space is empty," he says. Computers have a similar mechanism that will actually switch off rather than just go onto standby when no one is working at them. "Moving office can be a good time to review the company's IT provision," adds Howard. "Using techniques like Voice over IP that run over the internet rather than a traditional phone line can also help to save money on your utility bills."
- Could any material your company stores on-site be stored away from the office? Off-site storage enables paperwork or official records that are no longer current but which cannot be destroyed for legal reasons to be stored in a secure, monitored environment at a much cheaper rate than office rent
- Remember the difference between a cosmetically attractive fit-out project and a highly efficient set-up often reflects the amount of time and energy that goes into planning and briefing the teams involved. In other words, meticulous planning always pays

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Moving house is always stressful. But moving to new business premises can be just as fraught, especially when you're trying to keep clients – not to mention employees – happy too. The roster of housekeeping issues you may need to collar can be huge: should you need to upgrade to new IT kit? Will existing office furniture fit or do you have to fork out for new furnishings? Then there's the vexed issue of storage: how much is enough and will it be conveniently placed and accessible for all? Will you also decide to make a clean break with the past and get to grips with tackling a relentlessly spiralling consumables bill?

Dan Pope, service facilities manager for data management company The Read Group, was responsible for helping move Read to a new 8,000 square foot office in Sevenoaks, Kent, recently. For Pope, the move was an opportunity to reassess their consumables and IT spending right across the board. One of the issues he wanted to tackle was toner cartridge costs. "When we moved we already had two large colour printers," he recalls. "Toner cartridges for both were costing £100 a time. I'd worked out that the machines were costing us 17p per piece of paper, not including the paper.

"We needed three new machines, one for each floor of the new building. In the end we bought three new printers for £325 each, including toners and belts. But if I'd bought just the consumables for the older machine, it would have cost the same as buying a new machine." For Pope, the economic argument to upgrade was obvious.

The Read Group was also in serious need of more storage. He and his project manager for the move worked closely to

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make sure the new office design was built around practical storage facilities for all and they assessed a multitude of storage solutions along the way. "Don't neglect it; put most of your money into storage," says Pope. "Be careful with choosing the right units. A lot of cabinets are very heavy and expensive so you don't want to get it wrong. Everyone is always striving for the paperless office but until you actually move you don't realise how much stuff you have and you're always trying to accommodate for growth, too."

Wired up

Ken Bundy, a director of design for office refit company Claremont Interiors, says that many small businesses move office thinking their new wireless technology will do away with much of the need for hard-wiring technology into the new office. "Around 80% of companies can get by on using wireless but there's often 20% – architect companies or a media-type company that relies heavily on sophisticated imaging software – that really do need to be hard-wired into the new building. Wi-Fi is fine if it's general administration or solicitor-type work but for certain kinds of professions it's not so advisable."

However, the technology options are becoming more flexible. When Gill Baines, office manager for financial services company Milestone Capital in London, was managing a recent move to Covent Garden, Milestone's chosen telecoms supplier informed Baines – days before moving in – that there was insufficient capacity at the exchange for their new offices, and the company's bandwidth would actually be zero. "They had had seven weeks to tell us that they couldn't deliver the wireless connection they had originally promised," she says. "Without email or an internet connection we wouldn't be able to make any bank transfers, halting our entire operation."

A worried Baines contacted a company called Urban Wimax, which provides wireless broadband technology. "I felt we might be taking a risk with Wimax," she admits. "They're small and not well known but we went ahead." Despite a run-in with the new landlord who was concerned a new compact aerial might pose problems for others in the building, Urban Wimax got

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Milestone connected, saving money in the process. The previous provider told Baines the charges would be approximately £8,000 per year; Wimax offered a two-year contract with no installation charges at £2,648 a year.

Energy savings

Saving money is obviously great, but saving the environment – or at least making a bigger commitment to be more 'green' – is also a growing issue for many firms and when you moving office could be the perfect time to investigate new options. Uzair Bawany, managing director of financial recruitment company Contact Recruitment Group based in the City of London, recently moved the business a few doors down the street and was determined the move would be a greener solution for him and his staff too. "One key issue for us was the needless use of paper printed out," he says.

"We came at it from an environmental and a cost perspective. So we spent £35,000 on new IT equipment but with a great emphasis on large 19-inch flat screens," he adds. "That means it's easier for staff to read documents on-screen, rather than printing them out all the time. Also, because the flat screens and the new computers take up less bulk, it means we've been able to decrease the desk size for staff, increasing capacity in the office for more people."

Another option for companies is to go for a serviced or managed office. This has the advantage of doing away with those lurking expense surprises compared to >