

**Berg Kaprow Lewis**

Moving premises

Moving into new premises is usually an exciting milestone — marking the growth of your business or a new strategy. But few people realise beforehand how disruptive and time-consuming moving is likely to be.

The key to success is meticulous planning and good communication with everyone involved.

This briefing covers:

- Drawing up a move plan.
- Involving employees and maintaining relationships with customers and suppliers.
- Specifics such as transferring services and moving equipment.
- Hiring removal contractors.
- Managing the move itself.

1 Planning the move

1.1 For your move to be a success, start planning at least **six months ahead**.

- The top priorities are involving your employees (see **2**) and keeping customers happy (see **3**).

1.2 Draw up an **outline programme** with a timetable for the main planning and implementation stages.

- Some tasks will have longer lead times than you might think.
For example, altering directory entries, arranging leased telephone and data lines and finding removal contractors (see **6**).
- Plan to move during a quiet period.
- Taking the proposed moving day as D-day,

give each task a completion date such as D-2 (two weeks before the move) or D+1 (a week after the move). The date for D-day itself may change as time goes by.

1.3 Check that there are no **legal problems** which might prevent you either quitting your existing premises or moving into the new premises on D-day.

(See **Getting out of a lease** and **Renting premises**.)

- If your lease continues after the move, and your old building is empty, you may be eligible for rates relief. (See **Rent reviews** and **rating assessments**.)

1.4 Agree a preliminary **budget** for the move.

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about the services available to you.

- Property costs may include acquiring and fitting out the new premises, upgrading equipment and disposing of old premises.
- People costs may include relocation and redundancy expenses, recruitment costs, and the costs of briefings and time lost during the move.
- Sales may suffer from the disruption.

1.5 Put together a small **move team**, with one individual — the move co-ordinator — in overall charge.

- The move co-ordinator can liaise with other employees, the removal company and any other subcontractors.
The co-ordinator will delegate specific areas of responsibility to individual members of the move team.

For example, space planning and furniture; moving IT equipment; telecoms and data; regulations and health and safety.

- Employees can draw up their own task lists, in date order, to meet the completion dates in the outline programme.
Ensure each individual has enough time to carry out the tasks.

1.6 Timetable regular **meetings** to co-ordinate progress and keep the momentum going.

- Plans and costs will need to be agreed.
- Take advantage of the help available from your chosen removal company by bringing the contractors in on planning meetings.

2 Involving employees

2.1 Consult **all your employees** — and trade union representatives if applicable — well in advance of the planned move.

Without adequate consultation, you run the risk of employees resigning.

See **Managing change**.

- Involve employees in your plans.
In particular, employees will want a say in the space planning for the new premises.
- Keep employees up to date with briefings or presentations as the move progresses.

2.2 Moving premises will cause more problems with employees if it involves **relocation**.

- Relocating without employees' agreement could be a breach of their employment contracts, unless these include a suitable 'mobility clause'.
- Relocation is not an acceptable reason for

redundancy, unless the location is to a site too far away for reasonable travelling. Even then, you should offer your employees the chance to relocate and may want to offer some payment for the expenses involved.

- If employees are unable to relocate, you may be required to offer a redundancy package (see **Redundancy**).
- Recognise any hardship or expense that may result from the move, and agree any appropriate compensation.
For example, employees may have to move house or change their children's schools.

3 Maintaining relationships

3.1 Send a notice of change of address to your **customers and suppliers** well in advance.

- Explain why you are moving and use it as a marketing opportunity.
For example, explain you have outgrown the old place and invite them to a party to mark the opening of your new premises.
- Where appropriate, include a map of how to find your new premises.
- Key customers may merit a phone call or a visit to explain why you are moving.

3.2 Inform the authorities and **other contacts**.

- Going through the files will reveal contacts that may not be on your database.
For example, banks, credit card issuers, professional advisers, insurers and couriers.

3.3 Order **stationery** showing the new address.

For example, letterhead, envelopes, address labels, compliment slips and business cards.

- Get written confirmation of any new telephone and fax numbers, and your postcode, before going ahead.

3.4 Amend all advertising and **promotional** material to show the new address.

- Notify any websites, databases and directories which have your old address.
- Amend any current advertising.
- If you are not printing new brochures with your new contact details, order change of address stickers to put on existing ones.

3.5 Set up a '**business as usual**' team, with the specific task of maintaining customer service levels throughout the move period.

➡ If you are a medium-sized company, relocation of people is particularly complicated. Contact **The Association of Relocation Agents** (08700 73 74 75 or www.relocationagents.com) for a free directory of members.

“Moving can be a very expensive business, in terms of both direct and indirect costs. So agree budgets at the outset, and then monitor your property and people costs throughout — bearing in mind that they will almost certainly be different from what you initially thought.”

David Gwynne-James, Gwynne-James Associates

“Even if your employment contracts include a mobility clause, you still have to be reasonable. To take an extreme example, you are not entitled to expect an employee to relocate from John O'Groats to Land's End over the weekend.”

Amanda Galashan, EmployEase

4 Transfer services

4.1 Redirect **mail** to the new address.

- Ask for a Redirection Application form at your local Post Office or call 0845 7740 740 to be sent one. Complete the form and apply by post or at the Post Office at least five working days before you move. The cost will depend on how long the mail is redirected for.
- Re-register your franking equipment if you move to a new postal district.

4.2 Contact your **telecoms provider** and request information on how to move premises with minimum inconvenience. For example, with BT you can:

- Take your old number with you.
- Leave your new number as a message recorded on your old number ('ceased number interception').
- Divert telephone and fax calls to the new numbers ('remote call forwarding') — if the expense is justified.

Check the costs and the minimum periods for these services.

4.3 At least 14 days beforehand, arrange for all **utilities** to be cut off, and all meters to be read, at the end of D-day.

- Read the meters yourself as well, and keep a written record.

4.4 In some cases, you may need to find **new suppliers** and end existing contracts.

- For example, office cleaning, window cleaning, waste disposal and maintenance.

4.5 Notify your **insurer** of the move and arrange any new insurance that is necessary.

5 Equipment and fit-out

If customers get poor service or cannot contact you during the move, your business will suffer.

5.1 You will need a business continuity **back-up plan** to ensure that you can continue to operate, even if the unexpected happens.

- To minimise downtime, consider using a specialist company to decommission and recommission your PCs, server and office machines. The larger removal companies can provide IT relocation services.

- A separate move co-ordinator may be needed for the IT element of the project, working alongside the main move team.

5.2 Draw up a detailed **configuration plan** for your telephone and computer systems. You may need to re-wire the new premises.

- Work out where you will need power outlets, telephone points and computer points (if your computers are networked). Avoid sunlight glare on computer screens. Visit the premises at different times of day to see where this will be a problem.

- Decide the optimum locations for printers, faxes, copiers, modems and scanners.

5.3 If you are buying **new equipment**, test it before you move and complete any necessary training.

5.4 Make any **alterations** to the new premises. For example, painting and new carpets.

- You may need written permission from the landlord before making alterations.

6 Hiring a removal contractor

Unless your company is very small, you will need professional help for the move.

6.1 Draw up a detailed **specification**. List what has to be moved, when, and the addresses of the old and new premises.

- Note any relevant factors such as access problems. For example no parking.
- Highlight any large or heavy items and any precious or fragile items.

6.2 Arrange joint **survey** visits with removal companies to the new and old premises.

- Agree loading and off-loading points and the broad timing of the move.
- Confirm that the removers will make the arrangements for parking removal vans.
- Confirm the number and type of crates required, when you need them and when you want them collected after the move.

6.3 Get detailed **quotes** from reputable removal companies and ask for references.

- Cost breakdowns let you compare quotes. They also help you decide how much to spend and how much to do yourself — for example, packing and unpacking.

“Liaising with your employees is an ongoing process, which helps the move team win everyone's support and reduces the risk of anything important being overlooked.”

David Gwynne-James,
Gwynne-James Associates

“Keep a separate file of important telephone numbers, which does not get packed. You can never rely on things not going wrong.”

Roy Ilott,
Roy Ilott & Associates

6.4 Make sure your property is **insured** during the move. The removal contractor will be able to offer several different levels of cover.

6.5 Devise an **outline plan**, with the removal company, including a contingencies section. This will form the working move document.

7 Move instructions

In the move instructions, spell out what each person must do, when, and how the move will be managed. A removal contractor can manage many aspects of the move and give informed advice on what tends to go wrong.

7.1 Emphasise that one of the keys to success is the correct **labelling** of every item. Sorting it out later can be disastrous. Devise a clear and unambiguous marking arrangement.

- Floor plans of the new premises should be marked up to show where things go. Use codes to show floor positions. For example 2.11 P4 might mean second floor, room 11, position 4.
- Colour coding is simple and effective.
- Open plan offices can be divided into sectors. The 'sector map' is then displayed on the door, so the removers know where to place each item.
- Label large items at each end.
- When numbering items without an obvious top side, beware of confusion between 6 and 9. Underline the number (6 or 9) to avoid misunderstandings.

7.2 The most common **removal container** is an open plastic crate. It has a slot at each end for the coloured labels, which are supplied. Make it clear how packing is to be handled.

- State when the crates will be available for packing, when they will be moved, and when they must be ready to go back. Crates returned late may incur extra costs.
- Crates should not be over-filled (or they will not stack up and may be impossible to lift) and all old labels should be removed.
- The removal company can pack central files, kitchen and stationery items, and everything else that is agreed.
- Use sealable crates for confidential files.

7.3 Explain the plans for moving **equipment**, including phones, PCs and any machinery.

- Wires and cables should be taped to items and marked to show what plugs in where.

7.4 Dedicate at least a day, a month before you move, to **throwing out** old files and clutter.

- Hire a shredder, or use a 'secure disposal' contractor, to deal with confidential data.
- Consider storing some documents with a records management company.
- Arrange for the local council to remove everything (eg furniture, files) that you wish to dispose of.

7.5 Explain how to code the contents of **filing cabinets**, drawers and shelves, so that you can put everything back in the same order. For example, a container label might read: 'Cabinet 1, top shelf'.

- Lockable filing cabinets can be moved full, as long as they are not too large or heavy.
- Secure empty rails or shelves.

7.6 Include a move schedule, which lists the **sequence** of what is moved when and details of how everything is coded.

- Decide what you will need last in the old premises and first at the new premises.
- Contractors generally prefer to fill the new premises from the top down.

8 Managing the move

8.1 If the removal company is not doing the packing, check that everyone is using the agreed **labelling** and packing procedures.

8.2 Decide a **rota** for who will be where, when.

- Decide how your move co-ordinator will communicate with the removal company.
- Arrange when employees should arrive at the new premises to unpack.

8.3 At the **new premises**, set up a help desk where people can note problems as they occur. Then prioritise what to sort out first.

8.4 At the **old premises**, complete the handover arrangements.

- This may include cleaning up, making good damage and handing over the keys. Leaving the premises in good condition may reduce your liability for repair and redecoration costs.

8.5 Make the move a **team effort**. Keep up employee morale by showing your gratitude.

- A little generosity in overtime pay and providing a meal will boost morale.

Expert contributors

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Further help

There are other Directors' Briefing titles that can help you. These briefings are referred to in the text by name.

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