

MAKE YOUR MOVE

TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR NEXT MOVE A SMOOTH ONE

BY ▶ KRISTEN HAMPSHIRE

When Studio Graphique relocated from a century home in Willoughby to the upstairs space of a movie theater in Shaker Square, the drastic change in setting opened up an opportunity to do far more than to just move stuff.

“Because we are a branding firm, we thought it was important to practice what we preach,” says Rachel Downey, principal and creative director. Transporting desks and chairs and files and equipment wasn’t enough. Nor was completely shifting a culture from a “quaint and quiet” office to a location where, Downey enthuses, “there is a great deal of urban energy and excitement.”

“We used moving as an opportunity to rebrand ourselves,” Downey says.

The timing was logical—perfect, really. But in the process, the staff racked up countless hours of non-billable time. It was worth it.

“We really considered this an investment in taking our firm to the next level,” Downey confirms, noting that Studio Graphique’s office manager orchestrated the physical move and oversaw packing efforts. The office swap occurred during a weekend. “Downtime is the biggest concern,” Downey says, speaking generally about business owners’ greatest stress when trading spaces.

Unplugging from a 24/7 world seems incomprehensible to those of us who are constantly connected to customers, staff and friends. Fortunately most businesses are not stranded during the physical move, with BlackBerries, cell phones and wireless Internet connections up and running at home, says Lori Cole, president of Cole and Co. Inc. Cole reviews a 14-page moving checklist with clients to prepare them for a move.



“Whether your company is one person or 1,000, it’s still the same list,” she says.

At the top should be this all-important question posed by Mike Dungan, vice president of Business Interiors & Environments. “Are you going to work differently in the new space?” he asks. A positive response triggers another set of questions geared toward transitioning an organization before a big move.

“Most people have a difficult time with change,” Dungan says. “We spend as many hours at our workplace as we do at home. A physical move can be a stressful time because people tend to be resistant to change and slow to adopt new routines and habits.”

The remedy for this moving bug: planning. Lots of it.

“A month is last-minute in the moving world,” Dungan says simply.

MASTER THE PROCESS

Most business owners underestimate the cost and time required to clean out, pack up and move out. As Dungan notes, a move becomes more stressful when owners do not communicate, or they assume that everyone knows and understands “the plan.”

Dungan divides a physical move

into two categories: physical property and technology/services. The latter takes priority on move day to minimize downtime. Physical property, including files, existing furniture and personal items, should be organized with the help of staff. Dungan suggests establishing milestones. “Set dates when file cabinets and desks should be empty, and when employees will be disconnected from technology and phone systems,” he says, emphasizing communication. Create a flowchart; post a spreadsheet.

David Wagner, principal and co-founder of Chartwell Group, suggests mentally walking through the moving steps. “If you can visualize the process as a funnel, as you go forward with each step in the process, you start to get laser sharp,” he says. Make a list, then delegate. Who is in charge of technology? Who will notify customers of the move? Who will steer move-day activities?

Wagner advises assembling a move team early on in the process.

Downey’s team consisted of the entire staff. By involving everyone in the branding, build-out of the space and physical move, the process actually reinvigorated employees, she says. “Our creative team selected all the furniture,

the colors, the finishes,” she says. “We worked together to pick every last detail of what we wanted in the space.”

Addressing the office build-out and renovation is critical to preparing for the move. That way, the new space will accommodate a company’s culture, says Paul Stroud, an associate with Chartwell Group.

“Identify your needs—what you need today and what you’ll need in your new world,” Stroud says. “Then hire an architectural service to help hang real numbers, size and shape to those needs.”

Downey knew that her staff’s creative juices would flow better in an unconfined environment. “The ideas that can be generated from being able to just turn around and bounce something off of someone else is why we kept an open floor plan in our design studio,” she

explains. Walls do not reach the ceiling, and natural light and energy from the bustling square spills into the space.

While considering priorities for a new space, many businesses, like Studio Graphique, decide a move is prime time to upgrade systems or furniture. Better yet, there’s less to physically move, and servers can be set up in the new space for a virtually seamless technology transition (read: no downtime).

CLEAN HOUSE

Paper and furniture are variables that drive up the cost and time required to move. “The first thing to do is set up a budget and realistic time frame to accomplish a physical move,” Cole says.

But how much can moving cost?

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OUTGROWING YOUR WORKSPACE?

As you consider your new digs, design with productivity in mind. Retrofit your workspace to accommodate personal and professional needs; reconfigure loft space, a warehouse or home office. COSE will host a panel of speakers that will address these issues and more called “Building Community and Creating Places in NEO” this month.

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WHILE MAKING PLANS FOR THE MOVE AND INVOLVING THE STAFF, BE SURE TO ANNOUNCE THE RELOCATION TO CLIENTS AND POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS WELL IN ADVANCE.

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“That’s like asking how much a house costs,” Cole says. A business with virtually no paper may rent a moving truck and enlist staff in the hard labor. Or, a corporation with years of files and complex technology or equipment could require 18 months of planning plus an outside consultant’s assistance in coordinating the transition.

While six weeks may be plenty of time to build out a 3,000-square-foot space and move in, plan on at least tripling that time for a significant move into a large space, Stroud says.

Ultimately, companies that prepare in advance can better control moving costs, Stroud adds. “If you are going to move a 50,000-square-foot office in a few months, you’ll pay top dollar for ancillary services,” he says.

After identifying a move date, coordinate technology and phone system hookups with service providers. Several months out is best, Dungan says. “You want to get as far in front of those decisions as you can so you aren’t scrambling at the last minute.” (See page 23 for more details related to your phone system when moving.)

In the meantime, staff can begin purging paper—out with the old.

“It is very expensive to move paper and then throw it away,” says Cole, who coordinated the COSE and Greater

Cleveland Partnership move from Tower City to the historic Higbee building.

“They had accumulated 15 years of files, so the biggest part of the project was not moving it all, but disposing of it.”

Move captains were delegated and a timeframe developed for each department to clean, organize, disconnect and move. Shred barrels placed in the office were picked up on a schedule. “We published the records retention policy so people knew what to keep and what to throw away,” Cole says. Additionally, COSE made donations of supplies and stationary to schools and hosted liquidation sales.

Cole likens the mass clean-out to preparing a home for a move. “You want to have garage sales and the donation trucks at your house every week,” she says.

Dungan suggests organizing a purge party. “Moving is a good opportunity to shed your old skin,” he says. “You may archive or even consider an off-site storage situation,” Dungan adds.

Most important, a designated clean-out day also accomplishes the goal of involving staff and ensuring that everyone is on the same page with the move. The transition will seem more gradual as the team prepares. “The more you communicate, the better you’ll set yourself up for a successful move.”

PLAN TO CHANGE

While making plans for the move and involving the staff, be sure to announce the relocation to clients and potential customers well in advance. Cole suggests sending e-newsletters, making personal phone calls, and sending press releases to local newspapers that print a “moving on” type section. “That way, people don’t panic that your company has gone out of business,” Cole says.

At the same time, expect hiccups and problems. Despite planning and purging, organizing and following a process, unexpected issues will crop up. There will be some panic. But flexible organizations will make a smooth move anyway.

“You can strategize and even rehearse to the point where everyone knows in their sleep what will happen, and all of a sudden the space isn’t ready because it didn’t pass inspection, or there’s an outside factor that you have no control over,” Dungan says.

Perhaps a company’s lease expires before its new building is ready, or construction halts and a build-out project is six weeks behind schedule. “Those are issues that can be walked through and discussed in advance,” Dungan says. In other words, create a plan—and then a plan B.

Breaking the process down into palatable steps helped Downey sandwich her office relocation between her family’s move from South Euclid to Cleveland, and her husband’s business move to Shaker Square. “We moved in multiple phases,” she says.

Because the entire staff understood their role in the process, Downey didn’t face the move alone. “It kept me sane that there were other people involved in the change,” she says. “It wasn’t all resting on my shoulders.” <<



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