

The most common relocation & refurbishment mistakes...

1. Avoiding The Issue

Relocating or refurbishing your premises is, even for a smaller entity, a substantial and potentially stressful exercise. Leaving the organization of the project to the last minute will reduce your options, may affect your deadlines and will result in higher costs.

2. Managing The Project Yourself

Although managing the project personally works for some people this is generally reserved for someone with both relevant experience and free time. Most people appointed with the responsibility for a relocation or refurbishment are given such a duty in addition to their everyday tasks.

In most cases appointing a skilled professional to organize and run the project, and then in turn managing them, will mean you have control but are not constantly distracted from your other responsibilities.

3. Not Undertaking A Workplace Audit

When striving to improve your environment, image and efficiency it is important, through a workplace audit, to review your current set up, use of space and day to day operations, as a platform to design from.

4. Not Getting Staff Opinions

One of the major benefits following a well designed refurbishment or organized relocation is a significant improvement in staff efficiency and morale.

Addressing the staff's issues with your current workplace and identifying what works for them, what doesn't and what they might like to see incorporated in the new environment, means they are participating in the design process and less likely to resent the changes that will occur in due course.

5. Not Preparing A Brief

The common difference between a good project and an excellent project is usually how meticulously the planning stage was conducted.

The first and most important planning element is to create a clear and concise brief covering how the project must accommodate your organization now and in the future, support it in achieving its strategic goals and in demonstrating its brand and culture.

6. Poor Building Selection

When relocating; choosing the wrong building is not easily correctible. It is so much more than finding the correct amount of space or an appropriate building appearance.

A detailed building survey is highly recommended not only to ascertain its structural integrity but to also, for example, consider the incoming supplies (gas, water and electricity) in relation to your requirements.

An older building (more than 15-years) may also not conform with all the current regulations and should therefore be risk assessed to ensure compliance can be achieved.

7. Overlooking Planning Permission And Building Regulations

Relocation and refurbishment projects are, for the most part, subject to various approvals. Certain works will require planning permission and virtually all refurbishment projects need Building Control approval.

A non-compliant workplace may mean you are liable to prosecution in the event of an incident occurring, or not being contained, as a result of substandard unapproved work. You may also find you are uninsured in such circumstances.

Building Regulations should be adhered to at the design stage and planning requirements applied for as early as possible.

8. Being Discriminatory

The Equalities Act forms part of the Building Control process but is worth mentioning separately as it makes it unlawful to discriminate against people through employment.

Regulators of the Act can impose civil and criminal penalties on organizations who do not take all appropriate and possible action to avoid discrimination.

The Equalities Act should be assessed and incorporated at the design stage by writing an Access Statement to determine your ability to meet the requirements of impaired and disabled visitors and staff, following your refurbishment.

9. Not Informing The Health And Safety Executive

All projects exceeding a mandatory scale must be advised to the local Health and Safety Executive, including a description of the project, the suppliers and subcontractors being used and the risks involved.

Responsibility for complying with all Health and Safety law ultimately rests with you, the employer.

10. Choosing The Wrong Contractor Or Team Of Contractors

One of the most essential ingredients to a successful relocation and/or refurbishment is the contractor employed to manage the work involved.

Your choice of contractor should be able to demonstrate their competence with similar sized projects and be able to offer referees (satisfied customers) with which you can make direct contact for an opinion.

The contractor should be enthusiastic about your project and convey their confidence to meet the brief, project timescale and budget. They should also be able to demonstrate their insurances and an impeccable Health and Safety record.

It is easy for any contractor to promise the world just to get your order. A good contractor will be able to walk you through the processes involved, take on the project with a “whatever it takes” attitude, but remain realistic and sensible.

A contractor’s ability can be measured by their approach with snagging. The better contractors have a policy of snagging on route rather than at the end of the project to ensure a tidy and immediate handover.

You are going to be working alongside your contractor for weeks, maybe months. Make sure you have the time you need to be absolutely comfortable with your selection.

11. Not Running A Safe Site

Operating a safe site is not just about informing the Health and Safety Executive. A safe site is born when considered at the design stage through a Pre-construction Safety File in which the methods of build, for the design, and associated risks are measured and assessed.

As the project develops the Pre-construction Safety File evolves into the Construction Safety File and this document demonstrates the method with the lowest possible risk for undertaking the work designed.

Both the moral and commercial dangers in not complying with Health and Safety law can be costly.

12. Forgetting To Be Green

The impact your organization has on the environment is important to both customers and staff alike. Your green credentials are now often a major factor in determining if you will be a good supplier.

Commercially; being green is an efficient policy. There are various cost savings available from simple energy efficiency measures to tax incentives that are related to certain product specifications.

There are also various operational elements that can often be reassessed in most organizations to be more efficient, saving money and energy.

The green agenda is certainly not going anywhere and having a clear target for your business as part of the project brief is essential.

13. Not Worrying About Dilapidations Until You Vacate

Apart from having the opportunity to negotiate on your liability with regards dilapidations when relocating or renewing a lease, it is important to make a budgetary provision to make good your environment when you leave.

Commonly you will be required to return the space you occupy to the exact condition/layout that you inherited. There are however many variations on this theme and it is incredibly important to be clear on your liability to the landlord and to plan for your exit appropriately.

Remember, you will be expected to complete any dilapidation work before your lease expires. This may mean planning your vacation in advance and not leaving it until the last day of your lease. Failure to dilapidate appropriately will result in the landlord seeking to recover their

costs, plus any losses and fees associated. The landlord usually holds a substantial deposit on your lease and generally maintains the right to offset dilapidations against it.

Landlords do like to hold back on agreeing a schedule of dilapidations until the last minute. It is after all a potential profit making process for them if you vacate and do not sufficiently dilapidate. It is imperative then to begin dilapidation negotiations well in advance of your lease expiry date.

14.Thinking – “It Is Only The Communications Room”

The hub of just about every modern organization is all too often under specified, without sufficient power, not securely installed and crammed into a room that is too small.

This room is one of your most important areas and it must be carefully evaluated and sufficiently accommodated.

15.Overlooking The Leading In Times On Phone And Broadband Services

Possibly one of the most stressful elements in any relocation or refurbishment is ensuring not the infrastructure of the new environment is ready but the link to the outside world.

As part of your workplace audit and brief you should be able to determine your requirements and the key to success is ordering these as quickly as possible.

16.Going With “Best Ever Deal” Type Furniture

Furniture is often the product which receives the smallest amount of consideration in the planning process. Whilst it is very tempting to choose cheap Stationary Catalogue type furniture this is all too often a short term solution.

No furniture guaranteed under 10-years is likely to have the lifespan to meet your needs. This therefore becomes a minimum requirement.

Make sure you see samples. Most reputable suppliers will deliver a workstation sample for you to trail which is by far the best way to be confident in what you are buying.

17.Not Calculating Tax Relief When Deciding The Final Specifications

Tax relief, in the form of capital allowances, is regularly overlooked by organizations despite as much of 50-70% of the costs (on average) being applicable for consideration.

Up to 100% in some cases, is set against the inclusion of green products, such as certain heating, ventilation and cooling systems.

Definitely a subject for discussion with your accountant before you finalize the project's specifications/costs, as, for example, a more expensive installation in the first instance may be cheaper across the life of its use.

18.Refurbishing Whilst Insufficiently Insured

Both a refurbishment and relocation contract will develop various insurance-related queries. It is very important to ensure that sufficient cover is in place to protect all parties and their interests.

A common example is to determine at what point products on the floor become an installation. At this point responsibility for the installation, in terms of insurance, usually transfers from the contractor to the client.

A typical approach is to take out a Joints Names Policy, with all interested parties, including the Landlord, on an "all risks" basis. Whatever the circumstances you can be sure your current policy will be insufficient and a discussion with your broker therefore necessary.

19. Not Liaising With Your Landlord

The better your relationship with the landlord the more successful your project is likely to be. After all most any building alterations require their consent first and foremost.

Alterations/refurbishment is dealt with by a license in the lease and you will need the landlord's full cooperation to have this approved quickly and effectively.

You should also remember that most landlords' will have house rules, particularly in circumstances where their building is shared. It is important to establish these rules and negotiate where necessary as they may impact on your relocation plans and refurbishment costs.

Typical oversights include, assuming refurbishment work can be undertaken and that the lifts can be used in normal office hours. Installing out of office hours and hauling goods can increase costs and project timescales considerably.

20. Assuming At Handover All Is Done

Very rarely do all installations live out their life span without issue. Ensure your selected contractor has drawn up all appropriate warranties and is committed to your organization for those periods.

In addition, no matter how much planning took place, the world is an unpredictable place. What worked as a layout one day does not another. Make sure your contractor provides a comprehensive after sales care package, to support your organization in the future.

Who Can Help?

At Office Changes Ltd we have over 10-years experience successfully managing relocations and refurbishments. For more in depth assistance on any of these subjects please do not hesitate to contact us.