

White Paper: Moving Offices

An IT perspective...

Introduction

Moving offices, like moving home, is a stressful business. At Ethical IT we support over fifty small to medium size charities, some extremely large national social change organisations and NGO's, and a handful of single-person outfits; in almost every instance, moving offices brings up the same challenges and questions, logistics and sometimes last-minute dashes.

This White Paper shares with you some of our collective experiences and lessons learnt over the years helping our customers – big and small – move offices or expand into new premises. Our goal is to provide a simple checklist that can be added to any project plan when considering a move, to help you reduce the risk of missing that crucial bit of information or instruction to a third party that could be very costly as move day approaches.

Last but not least, our sister companies, The Ethical Property Company (www.ethicalproperty.co.uk) and The Ethical Property Foundation (www.ethicalproperty.org.uk) provide serviced offices and property advice, respectively, for the third sector – so may well be able to help further.

What's the worst that could happen?

It is surprising how often IT is put to the bottom of the list, despite how crucial it is to the running of any organisation. This can be down to the delegation of “the IT bits” to a third party or an Internet Service Provider (read: BT) who may well tell you that everything will be *fine*, and so it is left at that.

We have seen moves go very badly. In fact, one customer (whom we shall not name) were let down so badly by their telephony provider that they ended up as temporary residents in the Ethical IT offices in London for three weeks, running on a skeleton staff with basic systems, whilst it was all sorted out. We were happy to accommodate them and set up their servers in our offices as a workaround, but it was highly embarrassing and costly for the charity.

It need not be that way, as long as a process is followed that identifies the aspects where risks can become show-stoppers, and ensures a plan is in place for each. A well planned office move can be a golden opportunity to upgrade aspects of your IT such as the internet connection, cabling within the office, power provision, remote working policies etc., which can benefit the whole organisation in addition to the new office space itself.

What to look out for

1. Fibre

The new office is going to need lines, both for voice calls and internet. Fibre optic internet is rapidly being rolled out across the UK, and in areas where this is accessible your organisation can benefit from very high speed, reliable internet at very low cost. Conversely, in areas without fibre, taking up expensive Leased Lines may end up being the only real option to guarantee the connectivity you need to run the business. Including a requirement that your new property is within a fibre-enabled area could save a lot of money in future – you could for example move all your phone calls to Voice Over IP (VOIP) and do away with the old phone system, or replace your server with a cloud-based solution; your IT and telecoms providers can advise, as long as they are involved before you sign that lease.

A handy tool is the BT Openreach website that can help give an early indication of whether your new office is in a fibre-enabled area or not: <http://www.superfast-openreach.co.uk/where-and-when/>

2. Lead Times

Phone and Internet lines (fibre or otherwise) take many weeks to install, often needing a survey by BT Openreach, planning, then delivery. Openreach are notoriously bad at this, and you should take whatever lead time they give you and triple it. There are many unforeseen situations that can spring up at any stage, halting their progress - we have seen a single phone line install ending up needing pavements dug, local council permits, risk assessments and so on.

You may end up paying for a month or so where the new lines are not in use before you move, but this is well worth the peace of mind knowing they are in, tested and ready to migrate well ahead of move time.

3. Internal cabling

Office space in the UK rarely comes with internal cabling already in place. Your PCs and other devices like printers will all need to connect back to a central router or hub, and ensuring there are enough data points, in the right places – both for your move in but also for future when you want to move things around – is often overlooked. We work with a number of specialist cabling firms who have worked with charities many times before and can plan this properly; under-specifying the number of points and their location now can be very hampering in future and leave your beautiful new office space with ugly cables trailing everywhere in no time.

At least two data points per desk and three power sockets should be your goal, plus data points and power outlets for printers, scanners, wireless routers, franking machines and so on. Modern desks can be purchased with power, data points and cable management built into them to keep it neater.

4. Planning the switchover

Once lines are in, most telecoms providers can give a fixed date on which your existing numbers can be “ported” across to the new lines in the new location, allowing you to plan the move around that.

Having a fall back plan that allows you to forward your existing numbers to the new lines, or mobiles, should be possible too; check with your provider that they have a backup plan if the porting fails.

Likewise, the internet connection at the new location can be configured ahead of time, usually in such a way that switching your services to the new connection can be done over a weekend, with a rollback plan if the move does not go ahead. Your IT provider can give you this plan and the fallback options well ahead of time, as long as they are involved from the outset of the process.

A practical Checklist

1. Inform your IT, telecoms and Internet Service Provider (ISP) that you intend to move before you sign any lease agreement or even decide on the final property
2. Check for fibre optic internet at the proposed new location; your ISP or IT can help with this
3. Ask your IT provider at this point if you could upgrade phones to VOIP, and/or remove your old server and migrate to a cloud-based solution as part of the same office move project
4. Order new lines allowing at least three or four months lead time, possibly more
5. Ask your IT and telecoms / ISP providers for their plan of action (and costs!) for doing their parts, including backup plans should the move fall through, such as staff working from home
6. Engage with a cabling contractor to agree on the layout of data and power points in the office; do not scrimp on this – allowing for future growth or movement is crucial
7. Think about where your routers / wireless / servers are going to be located. If they are to be in the main office space they will make noise and generate heat which will need ventilation
8. Hold conference calls with all your suppliers at the start, middle and end of the process to ensure they are talking to one another. Free services like www.powwownow.com are useful

Our Conclusions

IT, internet lines, data cabling and telephony can seem like daunting topics to add to an already large list of requirements to consider when planning an office move. With the right questions asked and suppliers speaking to one another, however, it can be a smooth transition and a rare opportunity to greatly improve these systems and the office environment in general. Ethical IT have undertaken many of these projects and have very good suppliers who have proven themselves in tough

circumstances. If you would like to discuss your office move with us further, please do not hesitate to get in touch.