

movin' on up

If your law firm is considering a relocation, be prepared to play a vital role in ensuring the move's success by following several key steps.



A law firm relocation is a very significant and detailed process. Given the high cost of firm downtime, any relocation must be well coordinated, expedient, and seamless to your clients. Often, these transitions are very costly – both in indirect costs and unforeseen problems.

Law firms are increasingly recognizing the value of creating a task force of professionals to assist them in this transition. Whether you outsource the process or utilize a team of trusted vendor partners, the success of your relocation will be based on several distinct processes.

THE BIG PICTURE

As you review your options regarding a move, a critical question must be asked: What do you, your attorneys, and staff want the firm to look like after the relocation? Why is the firm relocating? Are you seeking cost control? Are you expanding parts of your practice? Are you trying to create a new image in the marketplace? How do you see your firm in the next five, 10, or even 20 years?

Leasing office space often requires you to forecast your space requirements as far out as 20 years. Also, you need to take your employees into consideration as you envision your future. What part of the city or region is geographically desirable or undesirable for your employees, partners, and clients? Are your employee and client populations concentrated in any particular areas? Is there a value in being the anchor tenant in a new area? Does the firm want its name on the building?



SHORTCUT

A firm's legal administrator can play a significant role in planning and executing a successful office relocation. Follow several key steps to ensure the process goes smoothly.

Your answers to these questions will drive many move-related purchasing decisions, including:

- furniture for the new location (new or used);
- the amount of office space for your firm (current and envisioned);
- telephone system (voice over IP);
- technology support (such as hardware and software upgrades);
- support assets (including personnel); and
- artwork and other accent pieces.

If it is in the firm's best interest to utilize a team of vendor partners instead of outsourcing, you must ensure each of your vendors has:

- a philosophy consistent with your firm's culture;
- human and hard assets to support your relocation, if necessary;
- the commitment to achieve your goals in the time frames you establish; and
- expertise in technology, space planning, furniture relocation, and security.

SMART PLANNING

A successful relocation starts with smart planning and a realistic budget, allowing you to pull together your team of experts to best ascertain the costs, both obvious and hidden, that will affect your relocation. This internal and/or external team may include individuals with expertise in:

- transferring highly complex technology infrastructures;
- maximizing your new work environment for efficiency of workflow, all while maintaining your firm's culture;
- protecting your firm's sensitive client information;
- relocating large and costly law libraries; and
- moving expensive furnishings, art, and antiques.

Your team of experts must be familiar with your firm's culture. Is your firm an organization in which people roll up their sleeves and digs right in, or is it a process-oriented firm with specific steps to be followed by all?

You also must understand the timing of activity in different departments so they are minimally impacted during the relocation. Listen to the various concerns

and opinions regarding the impact of your relocation to specific departments and make decisions accordingly.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

After you have selected your team of experts to assist you in facilitating a move with minimal disruptions, conduct a detailed analysis of each aspect of the relocation. What is available to you and my firm in the marketplace? What is the cost associated with each? Executing this analysis will give your firm a blueprint regarding steps to achieve your relocation objectives and ascertain what you want your firm to look like when you arrive.

"TIME AND MOTION"

A "Time and Motion" study will help you to determine the best way to transplant your firm to its new home with minimal direct and indirect costs. Consider:

- construction time to build out the space;
- time to ensure your technology infrastructure can be effectively transferred to its new location;
- time to make the move, whether it involves existing furniture, new pieces, or a combination;
- potential building restrictions regarding the move's date and time; and



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- unique assets, such as a library, that need to be moved, and the most cost-effective and safe way to accomplish that.

MOVE PLAN

With all the information you have gathered, build a move plan that allows you to achieve your objectives. Develop a timeline that takes you from the lease signing to final move-in and set-up.

The move plan will serve as a measure of progress, allowing you to assess whether you are on schedule, behind or ahead, and facilitate scheduling of multiple tasks and vendors to achieve timely relocation.

PRE-MOVE SEMINAR

A pre-move seminar allows you to draw on everyone's expertise, ensuring decisions are optimal for all individuals and departments. You want to be certain the date for your move does not impact a critical court date or an accounting event that can't be moved.

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- maintaining routine correspondence about the relocation's progress, either by intranet or e-mail;
- having your vendor(s) display a mock-up of the new space, or even a tour of the building, to show off the "new look;" and
- conducting to identify any needs that can be met with proper planning.

FINAL DETAILS

Before you breathe a sigh of relief and pat yourself on the back, don't forget the many details that may not yet have been addressed. Among them:

- copier support;
- security in your new space;
- printing and stationery changes;
- mailroom support;
- employee communications;
- client communications;
- vendor communications;
- changes in office policies or parking guidelines;
- emergency response requirements;
- employee tours of the new facilities;
- phone book and Web site listing changes;
- changes in risk management needs and requirements;
- liquidation of furniture and other assets not going to the new location; and
- purging and document destruction.

Relocating your firm is a task that requires discipline and attention to detail. It must be the result of a team of dedicated people striving to create a better and more dynamic work environment. The task cannot be taken lightly, and it requires a commitment from everyone in the firm. ✨

about the author

Craig Mervine is Vice President of Business Development for Daryl Flood Mobility Solutions, a company that specializes in Corporate Commercial Relocations. Contact him at cmervine@darylflood.com.



For more information, please contact:

Daryl Flood, Inc.
Dallas • Houston

Main 972.745.9400 Toll-Free 800.325.9340
www.darylflood.com