

Preparing for Your Office Move: Tips to Promote Success

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For the past year, Carmichael has been searching for—and planning to relocate to—its new office in Roswell, Georgia (11660 Alpharetta Hwy, Bldg. 100, Ste. 100, to be exact). In summer 2018, with a lot of planning and persistence, and the help of several trusted advisors, Carmichael relocated its entire team to a larger, more modern and capable facility.

As every business owner knows (or soon learns), moving is expensive, and a costly move is not automatically a successful one. To minimize expense and disruption, we worked diligently, not only to select our location carefully but also to ensure our site, building and offices were properly equipped for us to service our customers and grow our business into the foreseeable future.

Both before and during the move, we explored some new techniques—and learned a lot about what makes a move go smoothly. By sharing our experience and expertise with our customers and associates, we hope their upcoming moves will be as successful as ours.

Who Is Moving, and Why?

Office relocations, though inconvenient, are a strong indicator of business growth, and well-planned relocations can feed new opportunities and inject employee enthusiasm into most organizations. Per Atlas Van Lines' Corporate Relocation Survey*, companies of all sizes are moving, with fairly even distribution among small, midsize and large companies. Although the reasons firms move change over time, the top three factors almost always stay the same—lack of local talent, expansion efforts, and company growth.

Moving Considerations that Matter

For Any Move

- Opportunities for greater operational efficiencies
- Proximity to end users and target markets
- Future labor pool to fill vacancies and allow for corporate growth
- Available real estate and market lease and buy rates
- Rental and housing markets for personnel, and average commute times
- Quality of life—crime rates, school ranking, accessibility to shopping, entertainment, parks and other amenities
- Utility service availability, costs and capacity
- Area infrastructure assets—not just roads and highway systems, but also rail lines, ports, fiber cabling and airports.

For an Out-of-Area Move

- Business-related costs, such as unemployment insurance and Workers' Compensation
- Potential differences in Right-to-Work laws
- Local and state business environment in terms of taxes and regulatory matters and the administrative process for reviews and approvals
- Economic development incentives that can offset short-term and long-term costs
- The financial stability and levels of public services of the state and local communities
- Weather differences

As one might expect, the passage of the U.S. Tax Cuts and Jobs Act had a significant impact on relocation decisions—especially budget calculations. However, it was not a primary motivation for moving, itself. (The Act eliminates relocation expense deductions until 2025).

Without further ado, let's work on making your next office move the best one, ever!

1 Moving Strategy #1—Put Technology First

As a company that specializes in technology, you might assume we would advocate for its importance, but this isn't just self-promotion on our part. Technology has become vital to nearly every business operation, and business owners must ensure their new workplace location has adequate connectivity—with capacity for future expansion.

Before site selection, work with an IT expert (either in-house or third-party) to document your current technology footprint—as well as your future plans and strategies—and evaluate all potential sites with that information in mind.

Pro Tip: *If you are due for a technology upgrade, moving is the perfect time. Moving and reconfiguring legacy equipment is a waste of time and resources.*

- On-Site Requirements: Is the site suitable for your current IT systems and equipment, as well as any planned upgrades?
- Internet Connectivity: Is your new office served by competitive Internet companies that offer speeds sufficient to meet your current and future needs? If you aren't sure, find out if any are underway.
- Cloud Strategy: Do you run applications or store data in the cloud, or do you want to do so? How about backup and recovery solutions? The use of cloud servers and environments reduces IT space considerations but increases the importance of reliable, high-speed Internet connections.
- Telecommunications: Do you use or want to adopt cloud-based telephony (VoIP)? Reliable Internet is vital, here. (We don't recommend anyone move a traditional "landline" phone system.) Is fast, reliable cellular service important for your workforce?

2 Moving Strategy #2—Design and Build Out with Care

Whether working with an existing office or building out an unfinished space, business owners almost always need to customize their new location to some degree. Below are some considerations and strategies to ensure your office fits the needs of you and your staff.

- Design and Layout: Will the office space be open or closed? Is team collaboration or employee solitude more important? Determine your layout well in advance, and if walls must be erected or torn down, ensure your architect gets them right in your blueprint.

- **Common Areas:** How will common space be designed and situated? You'll likely need a storage area, a space for a copier and a small kitchen, at least. You may also want mail and conference rooms. Give serious thought to your common-area needs and how they will work with your traffic flow.
- **Basic Necessities:** Do you need a bathroom, or is a communal one available in the office building? If you are adding a bathroom and kitchen, it's less expensive if they are adjacent.
- **Working Environment:** Do workers and their equipment have unique requirements, such as extra receptacles, special cooling needs, or high-intensity lighting? If so, plan for them.

Pro Tip: | *However much electrical capacity you think you need, ensure you have (or can add) 50% more.*

3 Moving Strategy #3—Connections Count

With an office move, cabling and networking are two of the biggest opportunities—and causes of tragic disappointment. Modern networks often involve far more than a server and a few desktops. Advance planning is vital for every connected device—including not only routers, access points, servers, and desktops, but also cameras and access control devices, A/V systems, phones and printers.

Network Mapping. Networks (which are so important that we recommend they be professionally designed), should be mapped in advance. The resulting document will be a diagram that shows every piece of equipment and connection, for current or planned use, that needs to be installed and operable on day one.

- **Cable Runs:** Cabling is a vital element of any wired network. Cable layouts should be completed, and cable conduits (called “chases”) should be installed before walls are closed and ceilings are lowered.
- **Technology Closets:** Wiring and server closets should be located in a secure, central and convenient location away from interior or exterior heat sources.
- **Electricity:** Power requirements and connections (receptacles, jacks, etc.) for equipment should be planned early, but confirmed right before build-out. Models change, and manufacturers don't always warn customers.

During any interior office construction project, the major components are always built and installed in a particular order: 1) walls, ceiling and infrastructure; 2) floor finishes; 3) furniture (e.g. desks, cubicles and conference room tables). Build your plans around this workflow and you will save both inconvenience and money.

Pro Tip: | *Don't expect contractors to install routers, switches, servers and other technology elements. For best results, a professional IT provider should install and configure them.*

4 Strategy #4—Stay in Touch

With all the effort that goes into planning and orchestrating a successful move, it's vital that business leaders not assume all the pieces will fall into place. Keeping everyone informed and aware of any responsibilities until the move is complete will ensure a great outcome.

- Shortly before you move, remind partners, vendors and customers of your new address and first day of operation.
- Move over a weekend or holiday to minimize customer disruption.
- Designate trusted personnel as “moving coordinators” that will oversee the move and its progress. Share that individual's contact information with everyone who might need help.
- In the old office, have someone walk each vacated area and make a note to address materials, personal items and/or problems.
- A few days before the move, have someone walk each area of the new office and confirm that equipment and furnishings have been, or are being, correctly staged and connected.
- Develop and publish a protocol to resolve any issues personnel encounter after the move.

Pro Tip: *Assume there will be a few hiccups and be ready for that possibility. Consider designating one person as a “floating troubleshooter” if you will not perform that role.*

Your Technology Environment: Manage It from Start to Finish

- If you are replacing outdated hardware or other technology with the move, configure the new machines to the greatest extent possible, beforehand. That includes installing software, testing device interoperability and other major operations.
- Identify a technology specialist—either in-house or with your IT firm—that can oversee powering down your systems and network at the old site, moving them to the new site, and reconfiguring them for use on the first business day.
- Confirm that all backups are up to date and securely stored offsite before powering down for the move.
- Designate and plan for a few “key” system components that will be operational on the first day in the new office in case you are unable to get your entire network and its systems up for day one. Laptops that were already fully configured and in use at the old location can come in handy, here.
- Don't overlook “peripheral” technology—office signage, telephone and paging systems, etc. Your office runs on more than computers and networks.

Final Thoughts

Although every move has its hiccups, the goal of any relocation is for the business to open its doors on the scheduled day—and to have the office appear calm and collected. Taking the steps we have outlined here will go a long way toward achieving that goal.

After you have moved in and confirmed that everything is operating as you had hoped, don't forget to host a celebration for your staff and clients. If key personnel went above and beyond, give them special recognition.



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