

# RELOCATION RELOCATION RELOCATION



They say that moving house is the second most stressful thing that will happen in your life. As ever who exactly they are, no-one seems to know, but clearly they haven't thought things through. If moving house is stressful, how much worse must it be to move an entire building full of people and equipment? FMJ spoke to Sarah Cole, managing director of Universal Commercial Relocation to get their top tips on how to make your move go as seamlessly as possible

**A**nyone who has been involved in the process knows exactly how hard it is to organise an entire office's move. The levels of organisation and planning involved will stress even the most experienced FM, and that's not to mention the budgeting...

Estimates suggest that US firms spent over \$12.5 billion on relocating in 2014.

There is a similar story on this side of the pond. The most high profile corporate move in recent times is probably the BBC's much publicised shift to Salford.

The initial cost of the move from the Capital to the North West was originally stated to be £155 million by the BBC itself. This figure was to cover "relocation packages for, the cost of the transition project, and all of the new technology we will need to install in Salford Quays." When complete costs over a 20-year period were factored in, the National Audit Office estimated the final figure to be £877 million.

Even assuming the BBC kept to its budget. It didn't. They then had to deal with opposition from the 1,500 staff who were asked to relocate 200 miles, indeed Peter Salmon, head of BBC North never actually relocated, continuing to commute from his home in South West London. Several years later and all the BBC bigwigs insist that the move was the best thing the corporation has done in 20 years.

So what can other firms do to avoid the hardships the BBC endured and skip straight to the good part. Sarah Cole is well placed to give advice. She has been at Universal Commercial

Relocations for 14 years, the last 12 months as managing director. The firm was founded by Cole's parents back in 1978 with commercial relocation as its core business. Its key clients span both the public (councils) and private (banks and law firms) sectors. They have branched out as well though, running a document archiving business and offering commercial storage options.

## STAFF

In Coles' decade and a half in relocation, she was previously a solicitor, she says clients have "increasingly wanted flexible leases and room for agile working, but with money becoming more readily available again some are looking longer term."

As any good FM will tell you, "people are key. Moving is a great time to look at the broader picture, to ask how a relocation can provide value for the people that make up your company. This can mean looking at efficient use of space, rejigging layouts and other ways of maximising creativity."

But a lot of work needs to go into making sure staff feel safe and comfortable throughout the move. "People often fear change," Cole points out. "They get used to the status quo and if you don't go out of your way to get them on board then things can become difficult." So how do you get them on board? "Some companies will appoint 'Move Champions' from amongst their staff, they can represent teams and entire departments throughout the process, giving staff a voice.

Traffic light systems are also popular. As are staff satisfaction surveys and opportunities to pitch ideas."

Of course this doesn't mean that you need to go down the now infamous Google route and install slides instead of stairs. Or follow Infosys lead by adding a bowling alley for lunch breaks. Box, headquartered in Palo Alto has replaced some of their ordinary chairs with swings whereas Facebook famously has a videogame room. These ideas, though fun to talk about won't necessarily translate well from California tech firms to London based law firms.

"Then, you have to make sure that the first day in the office, is business as usual. This means all the servers, computers et al have to work. Staff want to feel at home and have their doubts assuaged. On top of this, clients don't care about any excuses, they need you to do your job."

## PLANNING

But even if you bend over backwards, whilst going out of your way, to get your staff on board, your move will still be a stressful and time consuming operation. A quick internet search suggests that the average time a company will spend in an office is seven years before they move to pastures new. Clearly this means that few people at any given firm will have experience of moving offices, even more so when you consider the International Facility Management Association reveal that, "on average, 2/3 of employees who are given the task of managing an office relocation are fired or quit



within six months of the move.”

So how can people with limited, if any, experience ensure that their moves go smoothly? “Planning is essential,” Cole says. “You need to have a clear strategy and, simplistic as it sounds, you have to be clear what the plan is. Are you looking at smaller premises? Bigger? Are you thinking more expensive or cheaper? Even something as simple as knowing where you want to move to and when you have to be in by.”

### COMMUNICATION

“Good communication is essential,” Coles continues. “Both internally and externally. All the parties involved need to know what the others are doing, this means HR, FM and Procurement as well as everyone else involved in the move.

“Then you need to source the right service providers. This is absolutely fundamental.

“Far too often the choice of partner is purely cost based, but this is so short sighted. You need to consider how they can unlock potential for your company and for your workforce. Don’t let Procurement focus solely on the bottom line.”

### OPPORTUNITIES

Of course it’s not all about the negatives and things to avoid. Moving can be a great opportunity to introduce new procedures and layouts. Cole says that there are a whole slew of trends gripping firms of all shapes and sizes. Facilities managers will be well aware of the emphasis on hot desking and

maximising space. Most also want a greater say than they already have in looking at all elements of a building and its infrastructure, thinking how you can improve and streamline the components.

Relocation is also a fantastic time to upgrade your company’s technology.

It is also the perfect opportunity to study all the latest research and literature around employee morale. Last year Jane Henley, who at the time the report was released

was CEO of the World Green Building Council, explained that: “The evidence linking good office design and improved health, wellbeing and productivity of staff is now overwhelming. There is unquestionably a clear business case for investing in, developing and occupying healthier, greener buildings.

“Most businesses are already sitting on a treasure trove of information that can have an immediate impact on their two biggest expenses – people and

buildings. Understanding the relationship between the two can help businesses achieve significant competitive advantage.”

Other trends currently sweeping the industry include increased recognition of the importance of light and open space, a more branded workspace and more “break out” spaces, not just for lunch times but as places where staff can go to foster creativity.

