

# the expanded office



### Should We Stay or Should We Go?

The dilemma is a familiar one; if you think you've outgrown your office, do you try and change it so that once more it works for you, or do you start afresh elsewhere? The dilemma in question is encountered often in life, both at home and at work, especially if your business is expanding and you need to take on more staff. It is then that the question arises. Do you undertake an office refurbishment and redesign, or does your company relocate and start again with a brand new office interior design?

Either option can be expensive. However, the worst possible option is to avoid making the decision, or leaving the decision to the last minute. Doing so can often result in even higher costs, missed deadlines and a reduced range of opportunities.

### The Benefits of Office Refurbishment

Choosing to have your office refurbished brings with it many notable advantages:

- There is no need to spend thousands of pounds on moving
- The cost of a new lease is spared
- Choosing to stay put may reduce energy used in the move
- Staying in the same office encourages continuity

### The Benefits of Relocation

On the other hand, moving to a new location may be precisely what your company needs to move forward:

- A fresh start for employers and employees
- A chance to design the office for the 21st century
- New, greener ways of managing energy consumption can be incorporated into a design
- Potentially more space for employees or for new recruits
- Opportunity to rebrand and re-launch the business, if desired

### Common Points to Consider

Both office refurbishment and business relocation projects will be subject to certain approvals, either planning permission or at least, building control. These are legal requirements and failure to obtain them, or abide by their restrictions, can leave you liable to prosecution or fines. Not obtaining them, or flouting their demands, could also invalidate your insurance cover. They should also be applied for as quickly as possible as they take time to obtain. There are also legal requirements covering action taken to avoid discriminating against the disabled, which need to be considered.

Whether you are relocating or refurbishing, an important decision is which office fit-out specialist or contractor to use. Ideally, you should select experienced people with a track record of handling similar projects, and who have testimonials from past customers to prove it. You should also check out the contractor's Health and Safety awareness, and if they are suitably insured. One test is to ask their approach to snagging issues. A good contractor's approach will be to clear up problems as they happen and not just leave them until the end of the project.

### Managing the Project

Once you have reviewed the options, and made the decision, the next issue to be addressed is – who is going to manage it? If you are the hands on type, with stacks of free time to fill up, and the ability to be everything to everyone at all times you may wish to combine your day job with running the project yourself. Generally, that isn't the case, and someone within your organisation with relevant experience is seconded to managing the project, whilst part, or all, of their usual workload is shared out with others in the team.

### Next Steps

Whoever is appointed to run the project, a useful first exercise for them to conduct is a workplace audit. In essence that is a simple review of the status quo – who does what, where, when and why? That should give you the handle on space utilisation, operational requirements and a detailed working model to base your design on. It will also confirm your exact space requirements. As part of this exercise, it is always useful to gain staff buy-in to any proposed changes. Involve them. Listen to the issues or suggestions they might make and try and incorporate solutions to concerns within the design element of the project; the changes will then be "theirs" and not something imposed upon them from above.

That exercise completed, it's time to go strategic. Meticulous planning demands a coherent project brief and that should be concise, clear and explain how the current and future business needs will be met, support your corporate goals and demonstrate your brand identity and business culture. The right office refurbishment will flow from meticulous planning, as will the best office fit-out and a superb office interior design.

The project brief completed; adopt a note of caution, especially if you have decided to relocate. The worst possible thing that could happen is to choose the wrong building and then sign up to a twenty-year lease on it. It is not just a question of finding a suitable looking building, in the right area, with the correct amount of floor space. Qualified professionals should undertake a comprehensive survey of the building. It is also important to bear the age of the building in mind, as one more than fifteen years old may not comply with current legislation. Bringing an older building up to scratch conformity with current regulations may end up costing a small fortune.

### Some Common Mistakes

A classic mistake is forgetting that, in a leased property, you will be required to return the office space you occupy in the exact condition it was in when the lease began. This can make you rethink exciting ideas like knocking walls down, for effective but less drastic alternatives. Another common mistake is to end up with an inappropriately sized communications room, the electronic hub of your business, and one that should be fit for purpose. Another point to avoid is not factoring in sufficient lead times for voice and data lines or going for the cheapest possible office furniture that will end up having to be speedily replaced.

### **In Conclusion**

Whichever option you decide on, the solution for your need to cater for an expanding office needs not be a daunting one. There are specialist businesses with expertise in handling very similar projects out there to help you. Refurbishment or relocation both requires time, consideration and the involvement of employees, in order to create the office workspace which best reflects your business aims.

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**Head Office**

6 Bennet Road

Reading RG2 0QX

**T:** +44 (0)118 975 9750

**London Showroom**

Design Hub Clerkenwell

47 Gee Street

London EC1V 3RS

**T:** +44 (0)203 096 0066

**[www.officeprinciples.com](http://www.officeprinciples.com)**