

Office construction projects don't have to be a hassle

Conventional wisdom suggests that corporate executives facing a new building or office relocation project should be fearful of the design and construction process.

In fact, everyone has heard the adages for years that architects will design for awards and photo opportunities, without regard to cost; general contractors are out to "change-order" you to death and squeeze every penny from your fragile bottom line; or building inspectors and fire marshals will do everything within their power to foil your best attempts at completion within a reasonable time frame.

However, experience suggests that if you pick the right partners and properly manage your expectations, these processes are easily controllable, and the outcomes become fairly straightforward and predictable.



IN FOCUS

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or other senior executives until you are sure they are accurate.

- Be sure you have communicated accurately what is included in the budget and

Many in the commercial real estate world say you cannot possibly predict the time and cost before a ground-up or tenant improvement project starts. But adhering to budgets and schedules is less problematic than you might think.

There are a few rules that always should be followed:

- Never quote dollars or a schedule to your board

what is not. Your budget should cover all opportunities to spend and cut back, rather than be caught with missing line items.

- Review costs and local availability of labor and subcontractors, materials and services with outside experts.

- Carefully allocate action items between internal and external resources, mindful that keeping the business running at peak efficiency is a key goal and "experts" can often save you more than they cost.

DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

It may seem absurd, but when your improvements need to be constructed within a compressed schedule, make sure your plan is realistic, as it may take longer than you expect to order a phone system (assume eight to 12 weeks); ensure the public utili-

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ties will provide service on time; obtain construction permits (six to 12 weeks, depending on the city); and move through your company's internal expenditure approval processes (weeks or months).

The ability to successfully transition your technology platform from one location to another is essential. This is no easy task. A few helpful hints:

- The very minute you sign a lease, order your new phone service.
- Design your cable infrastructure to support your future needs, at least one "category" beyond your current ones.
- High-speed cable "in the street" does you no good. Arrange to have it brought to the building and assume those few hundred feet will take months.
- Order routers, racks, servers, and extra patch cables in every length imaginable as soon as you determine needs — and you will need more than you think.

TAMING THE TRAUMA

The relocation mantra is quite simple: During 99 percent of the project, only 1 percent of your business universe is affected. During the last 1 percent of the project, 100 percent of your staff, clients, customers and vendors are affected. A seamless transition is mandatory.

Trials and tribulations of the design and construction process will be forgotten during the move, but no one will forget if you are not operational on opening day.

Change is traumatic for a growing organization. When it becomes physical and environmental, the corporate consciousness seems unforgiving. To make your occupancy or relocation a success, you will need to remember:

- It's all about the people. Hold every hand, calm every nerve and go the extra mile.
- Align specific business and project needs to minimize down time and indirect costs.
- Avoid scheduling the move during high-volume production weeks, quarterly or annual accounting closes, major trade shows, etc.
- Build in dual redundancy of major systems (such as phones) and processes (standby technicians of every kind) to increase success.
- Purge your excess "junk" before you move.
- Do not use a canned checklist of activities; your needs will be unlike those of any other company.
- Communicate thoroughly with your project team and your employees to set appropriate expectations, then establish process and accountability.

The challenges of designing and constructing new facilities go well beyond the physical aspects of design and construction.

There are myriad strategies and tactics that will move you step by step through an orderly process. But it remains a people process, and people can make or break the project.

Managing the people and their expectations is where your valuable time should be spent.

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