

RELOCATING without risk

Relocating an office is fraught with pitfalls for the unwary, not the least of which is finding the right moving company. But where do you start, and what should you avoid?

The office is moving and you have been charged with the responsibility of choosing the right removalist. Simple, you might think. Just get the phonebook and let my fingers do the walking. Wrong! Unfortunately there is little relationship between the size or content of a Yellow Pages ad. and the quality of service rendered.

The forte of most moving companies is their long distance household division, while their weakest area is commercial moving. An experienced office mover knows that the difference between a residential and commercial move is as great a difference as night and day. Yes they will get you to your new location, but will it be on time, within budget, and without mishap? Probably not.

Your goal is to accomplish this move as a hero and not end up as a scapegoat. So instead of playing Russian Roulette with the phone book (and maybe your career), ask the building managers at both your present and new locations to recommend two or three office movers. Property management personnel have extensive first-hand experience with removalists and are as anxious as you to have the move be a success. As such, they are a great source to start your selection process.

Another avenue is to visit your new office building and inquire of tenants which mover they used and the quality of service. Suppliers, such as your solicitor, accountant, or insurance broker, may be also in a position to recommend an office mover. Since they don't want to jeopardise their relationship with you, they will be careful with their recommendations.

After you have selected and pre-qualified potential movers take time to meet individually with each mover's representative for an analysis of the move. Be certain that you fully understand what will be done and how the move will be carried out. Quotations from three movers should suffice. However, if it is a large move you may want to

solicit five quotations. Have someone of authority (not just an information gatherer) from your company meet with each mover during the inventory process. Inform the mover about your needs and ask how he proposes to meet them. The same representative from your company should meet with all of the movers.

During the initial walk-through or inventory process, determine whether you or the mover will be responsible for the packing of common areas like the central filing or library areas, the stationary room and the disassembly of screen partitions, workstations, shelving or Compactus systems. After the salesperson completes the inventory process, set a time for him or her to return and make a formal presentation. At that time they should bring a list of the **last** five companies whose offices his company moved with contact names and phone numbers. Insist that they not furnish a list of references (which, naturally, would be hand-picked to create a favourable impression). If your move is very large, request that he provide you with a list of comparable moves undertaken over the last 12 months. Ask him to also present actual pictures of the type moving equipment he will be using on your move. But beware: some removalists have been known to simply copy pictures and drawings of equipment they find in other moving company brochures and represent it as their own.

The next step will be to interview your removalist. Allow enough time for the interviewee to make a formal presentation, then to answer the following questions:

1. How will you handle our computers and other electronic equipment?

Many well-known movers in Australia are moving computers utilising methods that are exposing their client's life-blood to tremendous risk. The safest method is to firstly double wrap individually the

CPU, monitor and printer with at least "20mm bubble wrap". The bubble wrap will protect these components from shock caused by bumping, or in the extreme case of an accident whilst in transit, the computer will still be functional. After all the CPU contains your company's lifeblood.

To save IT people considerable downtime, the keyboard, mouse, mouse pad & associated cables should be placed into a plastic computer bag. All components should be labelled & coded accordingly.

The fully wrapped and protected equipment should then be placed onto a steel or wooden trolley. For safe transport the trolley should be sealed with Tintguard™, providing security and weather protection.



Computer Equipment packed for safe transit

2. What type of moving boxes will you provide?

The best moving box folds together and does not need tape.

The principal benefit in the type of box is that it saves staff hours of time building up boxes. Research shows that it takes 4 minutes and twelve seconds to build a conventional box. *

Tapeless Boxes™ save business downtime by only taking 11 seconds to build. In a major relocation,

this represents a business down time saving of hours.

* Source: Office Moving Systems



A security sealable Tapeless Box™ reduces downtime throughout the moving process.

3. How will you handle our mobile pedestals or plan drawers?

Although some removalists relocate these items on their own wheels. This method exposes the unit to potential damage.

There is a clever invention for minimising downtime during an office relocation. Instead of shutting down hours before your move to pack the contents of your furniture, movers can inflate a Spacepacker™ into each drawer, which immobilizes the contents so that nothing moves around or falls out. The drawers or desks are then simply placed onto a dolly allowing for safe transfer of these items. *Obviously if your removalist does not own Spacepackers™, you must empty and pack the contents of all the drawers.*

4. How will you handle our central filing & library areas?

Have the removalist, *under close supervision* load your files or books onto trolleys that look like

bookcases on wheels. This procedure like Spacepackers™ greatly reduces your downtime because it gives you 100% access to your files & books immediately before and after the move.

The "Dark Ages" method for moving central files & library areas is to pack the files or books into boxes where they can easily become mixed up. This system is very labour-intensive and puts you out of business before and after the move.

5. How will you handle our vertical file cabinets?

These cabinets can be successfully relocated without unloading the contents, saving business downtime.

If your removalist does not own a File Cabinet Lifter™, they will lift and move these cabinets through a variety of unsafe work practices. Any of which can expose the cabinet to damage through twisting and base distortion.

6. How will you protect the office building from getting damaged?

To protect the doorjambs, the removalists should clamp a special pad called a doorjamb protector to each doorjamb. To protect the carpet, your mover should place masonite sheets that run down the centre of the hallway carpet. To protect the walls your mover should run corrugated cardboard along the walls in high traffic areas. *Building*



Unique door protection devices minimise risk of damage to the office and furniture.

protection will also protect your furniture and contents from damage.

7. What quality of labour do you have?

Some removal companies actually train their labourers at the expense of the customer (sending out a totally inexperienced crew to undertake an office move).

Reputable companies hand pick staff and provide hands-on training prior to an employee's first job.

8. How will you load furniture into the van?

The level of sophistication of your mover can be immediately measured if the "floating" method for loading the furniture is used, instead of the stacking method. The former keeps the furniture on the dolly on the floor of the moving van. It is fast, safe, and efficient. The old fashioned way is the stacking method where the mover 'undollies' the furniture onto the truck and stacks it floor to ceiling. This procedure (used on most long distance household moves) can cause considerable crushing damage to anything at the bottom of the pile. It is also slow and very labour intensive.

9. How will you handle our screen partitions and workstations?

Screens have aluminium extrusions on each end that can cause considerable damage to building surfaces.

The best way to relocate these items is to use a 'Panel Moving System', which is part of the 'floating method'.

Movers that lift and drag these items in and out of the building are not only exposing the building surfaces to damage, but risk tearing and ripping the fabric panels.

10. What provisions do you have for contingencies such as a truck breakdown, an elevator failure, or the need for additional crew or equipment?

The best answer is that someone of authority from the moving company will be accessible during your move. Such a person should be an owner or general manager. Usually, the salesperson has no decision-making authority in an emergency or last minute change of strategy.

11. Please furnish me a list of the last five office moves that your company did with contacts, and phone numbers. After the mover leaves, call all five contacts and ask the following questions:

When did the mover move you? If the moves occurred more than 2 months ago, be suspicious. Ask the customers how well the mover protected their furniture, PCs and contents.

Ask them if and how the mover protected their offices against damage.

Ask them if the mover completed their jobs in the time allotted, and if the costs exceeded the prices quoted.

12. Last, but not least, don't attempt to save time by

staging a 'mass walk through', where all the bidders pitch at one time. This 'herd' concept has become very popular in recent years, but often undermines the entire selection process. First, movers on mass walk – through will be afraid to raise vital questions for the fear of informing their competitors how they propose to conduct the move.

The mass walk-through also encourages unrealistically low bids by intimidating those who participate into second-guessing their competitor's quote. Finally, it penalises those movers who are thorough and detailed, and subsequently slower in taking their inventory. In order to keep pace with the pack, they are forced to take shortcuts or overlook important details.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Geoff Warner, has extensive experience in business relocations in Australia, New Zealand and USA.

Due to his unique experience, Geoff has been able to perfect, innovative and efficient moving methods that reduce the hassle of moving by minimising downtime, disruption, and reduce the risk of damage to both the contents being moved and the premises.

Geoff Warner is the Managing Director of Melbourne based commercial moving contractors, **Australian Business Relocations Pty Ltd (ABR)**, an innovative and progressive company that in recent years has won the following awards:

1999 Business Award

1998 Workcover Award

1997 Workcover Award



ABR has featured in editorials in THE AGE, THE HERALD SUN and local Victorian business journals.

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