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# SMART MOVES

Fast-growing companies with expanding workforces need options when it comes to accommodating growth.

**Andy McCue** asks the experts and firms that have moved premises for their advice on relocation

**F**unding aside, one of the biggest constraints to company growth is its premises. Whether it's being able to accommodate a growing workforce in an office, or a manufacturer running out of capacity to increase production, a decision needs to be made about moving.

The timing of any such discussion might be triggered by a break in the lease, or the need to be nearer to customers or suppliers, or even to attract skilled workers.

For accountancy firm BDO, it was a break in the lease at its Bridgewater Place offices in Leeds that provided an opportunity to look at what kind of space could accommodate the changing way people are working, to incorporate the latest technology and to have grow-on space. Those conversations started a year before the lease break.

After ten years at Bridgewater Place, in April BDO took a 12,750 sq ft premises on the sixth floor of the new office building at Central Square on Wellington Street. Central Square is owned by M&G Real Estate

and was developed in partnership with Marrico Asset management. Nearly 150 BDO staff relocated to the office, which is open plan and has in-built technology to facilitate more collaborative, flexible working.

There were four sites available when the company started looking at new premises and considered Wellington Place, Sovereign Square, and Queen Street before opting for Central Square. "We wanted a fairly regular floorplan and the business district is moving to this side of town. But that wasn't the main driver. I liked the building and the quality of the light here," says Terry Jones, partner and head of BDO in Leeds.

Having the latest technology built into the office design and layout was important for BDO in supporting the drive for a paperless and more collaborative working environment. The office has Wi-Fi throughout as well as the integrated Microsoft Surface Hub in the meeting rooms. Surface Hub uses a large 4K touch-enabled display that enables staff to collaborate in real-time and run Microsoft

Office applications and the Skype for Business video-conferencing service.

Jones says: "We have gone from having one video-conferencing room to being able to use any room, which improves the client experience. At the end of a meeting we used to write it up and send out tomorrow. Now we do it in real-time, email it straight from the screen. But what really enhances the client experience is being able to work more collaboratively for better outcomes."

The move also gives BDO headroom to expand, although the flexible working culture means many people are often out of the office anyway. Jones says: "There is room for growth. We have 140 people but a lot of them aren't in the office all the time – we are a big advocate of flexible working. Even if we had everyone in here there are another 20 to 30 workstations."

## CALL FOR COLLABORATION

Engineering consultancy Mott MacDonald has moved its Sheffield team to a larger space in the refurbished Derwent House in the city centre. Like BDO, one of the drivers



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was the need for more flexible work spaces for up to 200 of the company's staff.

The seven-storey Derwent House was recently refurbished to bring it in line with the latest building and energy efficiency standards. The common areas and reception were overhauled to create a larger entrance, and staff amenities were added. Mott MacDonald's Sheffield team is supporting a variety of local and national clients on schemes, including the Lower Don flood alleviation scheme for Sheffield City Council, the £120m Glassworks retail and leisure scheme for Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council and the National College for Nuclear in Cumbria.

Rowan Crossingham, projects director at Mott MacDonald, says: "We are going from an office where it is very segregated and everybody is in their own little wing. We've gone for an agile working approach because we see the business can grow. We have kept teams within their own neighbourhoods. Although it's agile working and no-one actually has a desk, their neighbourhood is a cluster of 12 to 15 desks in a certain location in the building so they still have that belonging."

The actual logistics behind moving premises are also a factor that should not be underestimated. According to a survey of 600 SMEs by utility provider E.ON, three quarters of business owners said they had delayed moving premises because of fears about the hassle and stress involved.

Just under a third said moving is the most stressful task they have to deal with, only narrowly behind hiring staff. Some of those worries include the costs and time involved (28 per cent) with just over a quarter admitting they didn't know where to start.

Terry Gibbs, director of relocation services for the UK regions at business relocation specialists Harrow Green, has this advice: "The main thing is to ensure that disruption or downtime are minimised or eradicated. That means early engagement with your suppliers, including your relocation partner."

## INDUSTRIAL MOVES

An industrial relocation can often be a much bigger undertaking than an office move. OE Electrics in Wakefield chose to move when it ran out of space at its original premises. The company designs and manufactures power and data distribution units for the office, leisure, hospitality and education sectors.

Richard Durr, operations manager, says: "We were restricted for growth, we had mezzanine floors and were tripping over each other. We needed a purpose-built site for future growth and expansion."



OE Electrics: new home at Calder Park

"Minimise disruption or downtime by engaging early with your suppliers, including your relocation partner."

**Terry Gibbs**

Having previously leased its premises, OE Electrics bought a large plot of land at Calder Park for a facility that would give it room to grow. Durr explains: "We are about innovation and design, and we're budgeted to grow 20 per cent. We ship internationally and we'll continue to grow those markets. We now own a purpose-built facility and have the capacity to double volume."

The relocation involved months of planning to minimise the disruption of moving machines, production benches and testing equipment. The move started on a Friday afternoon and Durr says: "We were up and running at 8am on Monday morning."

Harrow Green handled that relocation for OE Electrics and Gibbs says the potential impact on production and the supply chain of switching off and moving machinery means early planning is crucial to keep any downtime to a minimum. He adds: "It's more about these machines needing to be decommissioned and recommissioned. For some machines only original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) can work on them. You need

to make sure the whole supply chain is fully aware well in advance so everyone knows what their bit is and they understand the interdependencies."

The logistics of an office move, however, has changed. Gibbs says: "It is far less about moving furniture and more about getting IT systems and services in place. And they might not even be moving the IT."

Another factor to plan for is the cultural change for staff, particularly if it is a different type of workspace to what they are used to. At BDO it was quite a bold move from a traditional office space to a modern, open plan and hot-desking environment.

Andy Mahon, partner at BDO, explains: "Because it was such a big shift from a traditional office, when you have got 140 people that's a big culture change. A number of people were quite worried about it. But bringing the staff along is important. We put a lot of time and effort into staff engagement and to get them to a position where they were all looking forward to it."

That's echoed by Jones, who adds: "My experience is that there are lots of intangible benefits. Staff seem happier working in this environment. It has helped people feel better about the space. For people thinking about it, take staff along with you."

Durr's advice is to think about the impact of the move on staff. He says: "Don't underestimate the change your staff have got to deal with on that Monday morning – like having a new canteen and where the toilets are. It is like going to a new house. You have got to bed into a place."