

businessrelocation

Architects help tenants maximize space, minimize costs

BY ALAN PETERSON

A professional architect with experience in office planning can be an invaluable member of the team you assemble to search for new space. An architect will lay the groundwork for your search, helping you to evaluate how much and what kind of space will match your immediate and future needs, what configurations will be most cost-effective and how the building you choose



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will impact your company brand.

One of the first things an architect will do is meet with you to create a program that details your current and future space requirements. Does your company expect to maintain a relatively stable size over the life of the new lease, or do you need to plan for growth?

If you are projecting rapid growth, the requirement for additional support areas, such as copy/mail rooms and kitchens, does not usually track proportionately with the increase in headcount. Will new employees need additional private offices or larger open cubicle areas? How big do the private offices need to be? What common spaces should be provided? Companies with large open environments tend to need more conference room space for team meetings and training, while those with many private offices can function comfortably with less. What will your technology needs be? To this "program" the architect will add a "circulation factor" for the aisles and hallways within the premises to come up with a "useable" square-footage amount.

An appropriate loss factor will be added to determine the baseline "rentable" square footage to use for your space search. (The loss factor is an allocation of common areas that varies according to the buildings being considered.)

Armed with this information, and added criteria such as your location preferences, a real estate consultant/broker can show you the available office spaces that most closely match

your needs and help identify the pros and cons of each alternative in the context of the perfect solution.

Evaluating efficiency

Once you have narrowed your options to a few buildings, the architect can prepare draft layouts as a guide to evaluating each building's efficiency. A good plan that optimizes your workspace configuration may ultimately reduce your square-footage needs, saving money for your company over the life of your lease.

An architect can also help you evaluate how a building's design elements and your space layout will portray your company's image to customers and prospective employees. Are you looking to reposition yourself in the marketplace or re-brand your company to a target audience? One building conveys a tone of solidity and stability, while another presents an image of youthfulness and flair. What do your peers' offices look like? What design choices are guiding the benchmark companies in your industry? An architect can help with this research.

Once you have zeroed in on a prospective building, your architect can help evaluate its major mechanical systems and configuration potential. Working within your time frame and budget, your architect may suggest alterations that can significantly impact your workflow, employee productivity and sense of community. Since most layout and design changes, although paid by the landlord, will ultimately be passed along to you in your negotiated rent, your architect can suggest alternatives and help you evaluate cost-effective options.

Your architect may also call on additional expertise, as needed, such as structural design and HVAC engineers, furniture vendors and technology resources.

An architect can cost anywhere from \$2 to \$5 per square foot. The higher your budget,

and the more layout and design changes you anticipate, the more your architect can save you by substituting design elements and creating a space-efficient layout.

Many times landlords will allow the cost of a tenant's architect to be paid out of an allowance to remodel the space. An architect may also save you management time during the construction phase by serving as a mediator between you and the general contractor, subcontractors and the landlord.

Who to hire?

Although I usually recommend hiring an independent architect, there are circumstances when a landlord's own architect may be the best choice, especially when the time frame for a move is very tight. The architect's familiarity with the building's intricacies, such as floor loads and cabling, can often serve to expedite construction.

On the other hand, the landlord's architect has a vested interest in showing a prospective tenant how perfectly he will fit into the space with the least amount of work. There may be little or no incentive to advise a prospective tenant that the space is actually too large or too small.

These considerations in the initial planning phase often add little to the total cost when you build out the space, yet can easily save hundreds of thousands of dollars or more if the unexpected occurs down the road.

If the plan considers both the direction an expansion would most likely take and how the space would best be divided to downsize, the negotiated lease can be adaptable regarding future expansions and contractions. The tenant may then be comfortable locking in a longer-term occupancy, thereby reducing the risk that future rate increases may impact the company's profitability.



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