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The Small Business Playbook



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



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A small business office is more than four walls and Wi-Fi—it's a creative and productive space full of moving pieces working together to power your business. To serve your customers with the very best products and services, you need to ensure every aspect of your operation—from procurement policies to floor plans—is properly configured.

This guide details all of the steps necessary for getting a new office space up-and-running and an existing office space in tip-top condition. Specifically, it covers the following:

3

Selecting the right office space

New office space is often necessary to accommodate an expanding workforce or increase your access to clients and customers. This section includes tips for selecting the best location and smartest lease arrangement.

7

Planning your office layout

Whether you're moving into a new space or simply rearranging your existing one, your office layout will dictate how your employees communicate and collaborate. This section details the benefits (and drawbacks) of open, closed, and modular plans.

8

Choosing office furnishings and supplies

Your office runs on employee energy, and your employees run on coffee, protein bars, and breakroom humor. This section identifies the supplies, furniture, and other office essentials critical to keeping your business functioning smoothly.

10

Finding the right suppliers

The best suppliers work as business partners who deliver what you need, when you need it, and at the right price. This section lists important criteria to consider when choosing suppliers, improving procurement policies, or shopping through an online marketplace.

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Keeping your office costs down

Don't let unnecessary expenses drain your budget. This section details simple ways to save money and manage supplies while maintaining a positive office experience.

When your office is running smoothly, you can spend more time generating profit and less time overcoming challenges.

Let's get started!

Section One

Selecting the right office space

Your office space should fit the needs of your business, offer a practical setting for your staff, and be able to support expanded operations and additional employees in the future.

Depending on your company's size and plans for growth, you may consider a variety of options, such as co-working in a shared workspace or a traditional office building. No matter which option you choose, here are some basic considerations if you're in the market for new office space.



Location

Location, location, location, goes the real estate agent maxim, and it really is true—especially for office space. Your business address determines not only where your team works, but how your business is perceived by clients and potential hires. Unfortunately, not every business can afford street-level space in a trendy downtown neighborhood, so you'll have to balance big dreams with real-world cost considerations. [Here are some important factors to consider:](#)



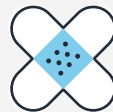
Accessibility

Start by evaluating how your employees will get to the office and whether there are easily accessible public transportation options. Don't assume that everyone owns a car, especially if you're dealing with a younger workforce. Also keep in mind potential visitors.



Sound

A location may look great, but how does it sound? That is to say—how close are you to the noise pollution from train tracks, hospitals, military bases, airports, or even street traffic? Will a fire engine's siren interrupt your client calls every time a kitten gets stuck in a tree? There are numerous options to mitigate noise, of course, but it's good to be aware in advance if such steps will be necessary.



Safety

Ensure the office is located in a safe area where employees are comfortable traveling to and from, especially at night. If the rent seems low, there may be a good reason. Even if the building itself is secure, keep in mind that employees may be parking on the street and shouldn't have to worry about theft or vandalism.



Amenities

Also consider whether the building is conveniently located near everyday amenities like restaurants, shopping, banks, and even medical facilities. Remember, your staff has personal responsibilities they'll need to attend to before, after, and during the weekday. If circumstances force you to take office space in an isolated part of town, make sure you provide extra time allowances for employees to handle these sorts of tasks.

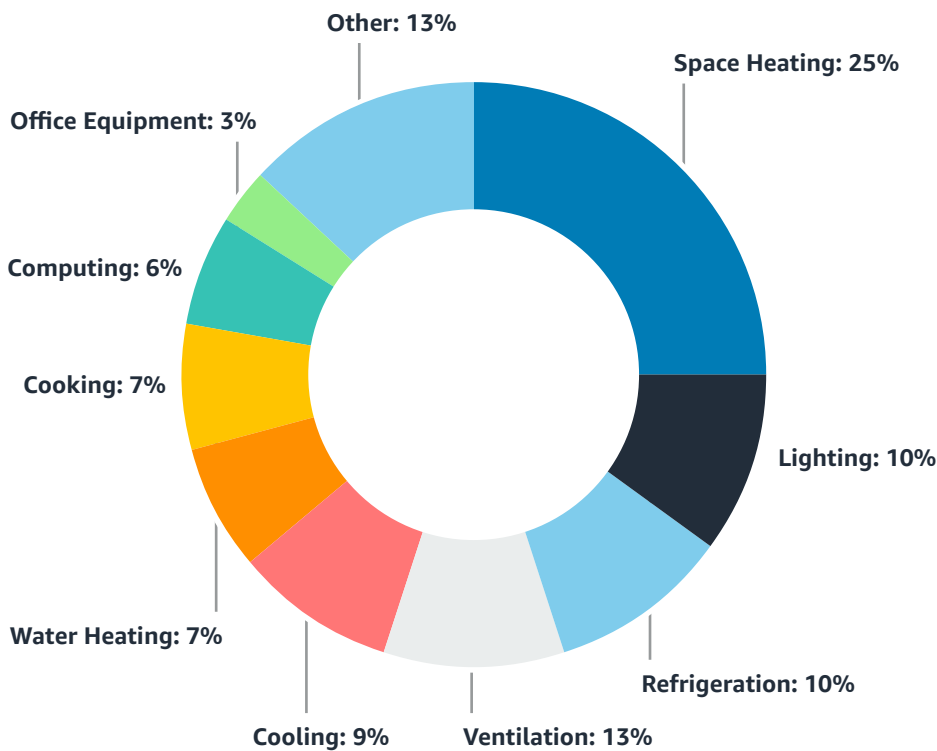
Size

Finding the right-sized office can be just as difficult as finding the right location. Leasing too large a space will cut into your monthly operating budget (and leave you with underutilized rooms), while getting too little space can limit your growth and potentially lead to yet another relocation.

As a rule of thumb, space requirements can be estimated according to the number of employees you have (current and expected) and your industry type. If you're operating a call center or sales center with an open space plan and no private offices, you may only need 150 square feet per person. If you're operating a client-facing business like a law office, though, you may need to account for 350 square feet per person. (See next section for a more detailed description of floor plans.)

Breakdown of Overall Energy Usage in Commercial Buildings

Total energy use 6,963 trillion Btu



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration (2016)



Always factor in utility bills—especially energy—when considering a space.

In a typical office building, the biggest drivers of energy costs are lighting and HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning), which together account for more than half of total energy use. The larger the space you choose, the more your monthly energy bill will be, especially during summer and winter.



“As a rule of thumb, space requirements can be estimated according to the number of employees you have and your industry type.”

Building

The office space you lease will likely be within a commercial office building or office complex. Considerations about the building, then, are just as important as the space itself.

A prospective tenant should ask several questions:

How old is the building?

An especially old building can offer vintage architecture and style—but will usually feature fewer amenities and less updated systems. You'll want to ensure that the plumbing and wiring are up-to-code, and that the elevator is reliable (especially if you're up a few floors).

Is there a staffed front desk?

And are they professional and polite? These building employees may represent the first impression a visitor has of your company.

Is the building secure?

Find out who has access to your floor or office space. Are doors to the outside always locked, or are they left propped open? Is there manned reception? Around-the-clock security?

What are the building hours?

Nine-to-five is a good start, but most businesses will want 24-hour access. How easy will it be for your staff to move in-and-out of the building after-hours?

Is there parking and bike storage?

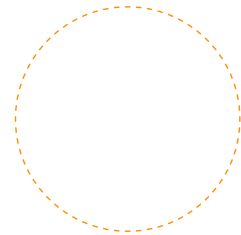
Is it reserved or open? And are there enough spaces available to accommodate all of your employees' vehicles and bikes or will some employees have to park on the street or otherwise off-site? And, again, are these areas accessible (and secure) after-hours?

How are maintenance issues handled?

If a pipe bursts in the bathroom, who is your maintenance contact? An outside contractor or an on-site employee? What happens if an incident occurs late in the evening?



"You'll want to ensure that the plumbing and wiring are up-to-code, and that the elevator is reliable (especially if you're up a few floors)."



Lease Lingo

Small businesses generally deal directly with landlords when making leasing arrangements. It's important to have a clear understanding of the lease terminology so that you can negotiate modifications as necessary.

Here are the key words or phrases that have special relevance in commercial real estate leases:

Base rent

The minimum amount of rent that's due under the terms of a lease before additional required payments are factored in.

Common area maintenance (CAM) charges

Fees associated with services to maintain common areas—including parking areas and gyms—operated by the building. These expenses are shared by all tenants.

Concessions

Incentives like abated rent or free parking a landlord might offer to entice a prospect to sign a long-term lease.

Gross lease

Arrangement in which the landlord pays all expenses associated with the property, including taxes, building insurance, and maintenance, while the tenant pays only the gross rental amount stated in the lease.

Lease option

Right that lets a tenant extend the lease—or purchase the property outright—under agreed-upon circumstances.

Net lease

Arrangement in which the tenant pays additional expenses associated with the property in addition to the rent. There are three basic types of net leases: a single-net lease includes property taxes, a double-net lease includes property taxes and insurance premiums, and a triple-net lease (also known as an NNN lease) includes the aforementioned expenses plus maintenance or CAM charges.

Rentable square feet

The total square feet of office space—including common areas like lobbies and bathrooms—used to calculate the rental rate.

Tenant improvement allowance

Amount a landlord is willing to spend for any modifications to the space, such as new paint or carpet.

Useable square feet

The amount of office space, expressed in square feet, that you will be leasing as private office space. This number does not include common areas shared by tenants.

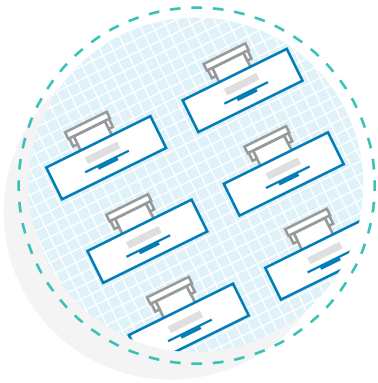
Section Two

Planning your office layout

After choosing an office, the next step is figuring out how you want to organize workspace and seating areas.

Office layouts have evolved tremendously over the last few years, with a trend toward open and collaborative workspaces. As you evaluate floor plan options, keep in mind your employees' preferred style of work and any future growth in your workforce.

Here's an overview of office floor plan layouts and how each can impact your company culture and productivity.



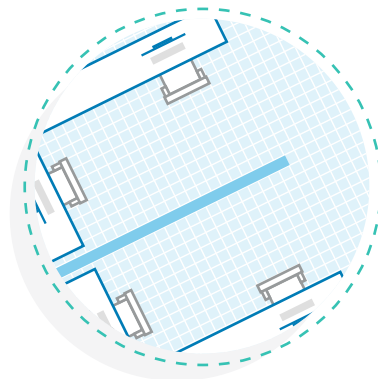
An **open plan** pulls down the walls and creates a collaborative environment where information flows freely. Coworkers ask each other questions without having to knock on doors or type out long emails. Interactions of all kinds—from chit chat to strategy sessions—are more frequent in open spaces than in closed environments where employees are sorted into separate office spaces.

An open plan can offer serious drawbacks, though—most notably the endless opportunities for distractions, which keep employees from doing their jobs, and lack of privacy, which can compromise the confidentiality of client or colleague communications.



A **closed plan** uses panels, cubicles, or walls to create separate workstations for individual employees. These spaces provide a layer of privacy and allow workers to focus on their assignments—or simply think through a problem—without any interruptions, intentional or otherwise.

Partitions between employees, however, may inhibit the informal communication and spontaneous collaboration that drive creative organizations. And closed plans can present logistical problems—individual or even small group workstations take up more space and won't fit as many employees as an open plan.



A **modular workstation** plan is a compromise between an open plan and a closed plan. With desks grouped in small clusters, employees get more privacy while still being able to collaborate amongst their group. Workstations also tend to be larger than those of an open plan and offer more storage.

Like any “compromise” solution, though, the modular workstation plan still won't satisfy everybody—particularly employees who need a totally isolated space to take important calls or meet with clients. Any floor plan you choose may need to be modified to fit the logistics of your business.

Section Three

Choosing office furnishings and supplies

As you solidify your office space and floor plan, it's time to think about supplies, furniture, and other essentials you need to keep your business operations running as smoothly as possible.

Concentrate on purchasing the items that best reflect and advance your business goals, whether that's revenue, reputation, or efficiency. And determine your budget before you start purchasing to help you narrow choices without compromising quality.

Here are some of the most common items offices will need:



Furnishings >>

Choosing the right furniture is as important as choosing the right type of office. A comfortable and ergonomic workplace not only contributes to well-being, it also affects office productivity and entices prospective employees. Furniture choices should also reflect your company's culture and work style. Choose furnishings that align with your brand and office personality.

- Desks
- Tables
- Chairs
- Sofas
- Whiteboards
- Filing cabinets
- Art



Basics >>

Think paper, folders, mailing supplies, and anything else you need to get work done and stay organized. These are all the various things you take for granted, but they will enable you to take notes, be creative and go about your normal daily business.

- Business cards
- Envelopes
- Notebooks
- Stationary
- Staplers
- Pens and highlighters



Technology >>

Whether your team is in the office or on the road, gear up with the technology that enables collaboration and efficiency. In addition to cost, evaluate size and placement of each piece of equipment to optimize space. You'll want to ensure that you've got the infrastructure in place to support a full office—that means ensuring your building is wired appropriately, then buying lots of power strips, phone lines, and Wi-Fi routers and boosters.

- Desktop computers
- Power strips
- Routers and other internet equipment
- Digital projectors
- Printers with extra ink and toner
- Backup and storage hard drives
- Paper shredders
- Office phones



Breakroom >>

Create a breakroom that provides a relaxing atmosphere and allows your team to fuel up, blow off steam, and recharge for the rest of the day.

- Coffee machines
- Water coolers
- Refrigerator
- Microwave
- Dishwasher
- Kitchen supplies
- Table and chairs
- Television



Cleanliness >>

Minimize clutter and keep things germ-free with the right products for janitorial needs.

- Hand sanitizer
- Cleaning solutions
- Paper towels
- Waste baskets
- Recycling bins

3 factors for evaluating office furnishings and equipment



Aesthetics

A well-designed office eases stress and increases productivity. But your furniture choices should also reflect your company's culture and work style. Choose furnishings that align with your brand and office personality.



Size

Maximize space by purchasing furniture and equipment that are proportionate to your office. Know the dimensions of your office and arrange furniture in a way that makes the space feel comfortable and look spacious.



Durability

Furnishings are an investment, and if you want that investment to pay off over time, you should be willing to spend a little extra to get equipment and accessories that won't break down after mere months of use. Heavy-use items like paper shredders and copy machines should be especially durable.

Section Four

Finding the right suppliers

To get the most value out of your office-supply budget, you first need to identify the right suppliers who can get you what you need, when you need it, and at the right price. **Here are some important criteria to consider:**

Cost

Many suppliers will be willing to work with you on price in order to get your business. Provide them with a list of the core items that you intend to order on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis in order to find out what discount you can expect on those purchases—then compare those prices with those offered from other vendors. Do keep in mind, though, that price should be only one factor in your final decision. Those savings don't mean much if the items don't arrive on time and in good condition.

Lead times

Lead time refers to the average period of time that elapses between a supplier receiving an order and shipping it. Make sure that the vendor you choose provides you with a reasonable lead time and favorable shipping options—especially for items like printer ink that you may need in a crunch.

Payment terms

Payment terms specify when that money is due and how it should be paid. Getting these terms right is obviously important, as businesses require steady capital to meet operational expenses. Find out the vendor's payment terms before you commit to any order. Can you pay with a credit card? Paypal? Bitcoin? And are payments due upon receipt? Net 30? Net 45? Make sure these policies align with your accounting practices.

Consolidate purchasing

Some businesses prefer to consolidate their buying with a handful of vendors. This allows you to build closer ties with account reps and see some potential discounts. While being tied to a few suppliers can simplify the purchasing process, this can also lead you to be locked into long-term contracts that limit your flexibility on product selection and price negotiations. Additionally, when you're dealing with multiple contracts, vendors, and payment processes, it becomes time-consuming to manage the ins and outs of supplier relationships.

Everything you love
about Amazon.
For your business.

From computer equipment to office supplies, Amazon Business has everything you need to keep your business running with exclusive features just for business buyers. Through the online marketplace, customers have access to the selection, convenience, and value that they know and love from Amazon, with features and benefits tailored to businesses.

Amazon Business also helps you discover new suppliers who can meet your purchasing needs with:

Cost: Amazon Business offers transparency when it comes to pricing as well as a variety of discounts for high-volume orders, all of which are available only to business customers. Unlike traditional business purchasing in which buyers are locked into a limited selection of products at set prices, Amazon Business allows businesses to comparison shop by viewing products and best prices in real time.

Lead times: With multiple shipping options available, including same-day shipping on some items, Amazon Business is able to deliver when you're in a time crunch.

Payment terms: Amazon Business offers flexibility. Multiple payment options are available to meet the needs of businesses.

Consolidate purchasing: Amazon Business offers hundreds of millions of products, which means businesses get a large selection to choose from but only one supplier to manage.

Getting started with Amazon Business is easy. To register for a free account, visit www.amazon.com/officeguide.

Section Five

Keeping your office costs down

Unnecessary office expenses can quickly cut into your business profits. Thankfully, it's easy to cut costs without cutting corners (and aggravating your employees). [Here are some simple ways to save money while maintaining a positive office experience.](#)



Power down whenever possible

To reduce your electricity bill, turn off everything you can when you leave the office at night. That goes for lights, printers, copiers, fax machines, and even coffee pots! Some computers will function better if you simply let them go into a “sleep” or “hibernate” mode, but others can be safely shut down. Taking these extra measures can save you up to a third on your annual electricity expenses.

Use energy-efficient lighting

Several options may make sense for your office:

Compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) are curly versions of the long tube fluorescent lights common in many office spaces. CFLs use considerably less electricity than traditional incandescents and typically pay for themselves in less than nine months.

The light-emitting diode (LED) is one of today's most popular lighting alternatives. Recessed downlights using LED bulbs are perfect for office and commercial settings and can significantly cut down on your power bill.

Occupancy sensors can save you money no matter what type of lighting you have installed, while providing a tremendous amount of convenience. For these sensors to be effective, though, they must be located where they can reliably detect activity, so make sure they'll work in your office space before investing in them.

Limit maintenance services

Daily office cleaning, like daily housekeeping, is ultimately a luxury. Employees generally aren't so busy that they can't empty their own trash or clean their own dishes. Having cleaners come through weekly instead of daily is a good compromise, letting you save money without cutting maintenance services completely.

Let employees work remotely

Obviously if you've acquired office space, you intend for workers to work there. But allowing your employees to log in from home for a few days a week can save you a lot of money in energy, janitorial, and other operational expenses.

Track your inventory

As you get situated in your new office, your initial inventory of supplies will start to diminish. Closely tracking inventory levels is an essential step in running an efficient office—printers should be full of paper and ink so important documents can be printed at any time, and envelopes should be available whenever somebody needs to send a letter out ASAP. The right approach isn't to “over purchase”—which just results in clutter—but to buy the right volume at the right time.

Visibility Can Lead To Cost Reduction

If you plan to have multiple employees making purchases for your business, you'll need analytics on what your team is spending so you can reconcile purchases on a regular basis and keep your budget in check.

Amazon Business provides a suite of analytical tools that streamline reconciliation, ensure accuracy in reporting, and give account administrators visibility into the team's purchasing.

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