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Facilities Relocation

Academic Moves Require Different Mindset

BY BOB KEELEY

Relocating an educational institution is a project that requires following a completely different set of rules from a typical corporate headquarters, manufacturing facility, or biotech laboratory relocation. The differences are many, and some are not so obvious.



The most significant difference encountered when relocating an educational institution is the need to tie the move to the academic calendar. This creates a big push for these types of projects to occur between June and August. This causes great competition for resources during those months.

It is nice to be able to schedule a move during regular working hours, which is possible with an educational facility relocation, but the open schedule that comes with corporate moves allow for far more flexibility.

There are specific logistic challenges encountered during educational facility moves. Typically, university buildings are older, with limited access and no swing space. Many of these buildings do not have loading docks or elevators and require additional labor and time to move in and out of them.

BOB KEELEY is president of Newton-based Diversified Project Management, a strategic real estate and facilities planning firm.

In addition, the items to be moved can be different and in some cases, custom built. For instance, there can be instances when dormitory furniture can be custom built to fit in each individual room and needs to be removed, refinished and reinstalled in exactly the same place and sequence.

Different standards also play a role. Corporate clients are more likely to link workflow changes and business process improvements to their moves. Corporate clients are inclined to use technology and project planning as strategic tools in their moves and have a specific set of furniture standards that are universally applied. Educational clients, on the other hand, are more likely to recycle older furniture within their facilities during moves. Educational clients may have regular furniture footprints similar to corporate clients, but they tend to have a larger variety of furniture footprints than the corporate sector.

There are significant differences in cultures between the corporate and educational clients. Corporate clients have a business mindset and apply a more universal approach to relocating, whereas educational clients tend to be individualistic and require special care and guidance. An educational institution move can include moving a professor's entire life's work. This has to be handled with extreme care. Relocations are a constant in the corporate world, but education professionals are much less accustomed to moving.

Many Masters

Another particular challenge encountered during an educational institution move is the

many divisions within some educational institutions. Although a university is a single entity, it may be comprised of several different schools, such as law or art, and each division is handled commensurate with its familiarity of the moving process.

These schools typically have their own budgets and teams for construction, furniture and moves, therefore, moving a single university may not be a centralized operation. This, in effect, creates multiple companies, each with an individual autonomy, control and standards. This was the case during a recent move for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Faculty, classrooms and labs were relocated to a new building. This involved working with many different segments of the university, and the needs of each had to be met.

The types of people encountered during an educational institution move are different from the types of people encountered during a typical corporate move. There is a significant difference dealing with the personal attention and specific requirements of each individual professor, for instance.

Unlike a typical corporate operation with an executive staff, a college professor has more of a personal stake in their department, classroom and research facilities. They are the decision-makers concerning layout and furnishing of their personal office space. This creates a situation that requires far more personal attention to each individual involved in the move.

Each move, no matter what type, requires flexibility and the ability to meet a client's particular set of needs, but educational institutions are a world all their own. ■

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