GUIDE FOR OFFICES

Returning to the Workplace **Part Two**

Your Covid Strategy

OFFICE

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Back-To-Office Strategy

On the 1st August, the government changed its posture from 'work from home if you can' to 'work from the office if you can'. Many businesses are taking note of the government's advice and are starting to encourage their employees back to the workplace. The new school term is around the corner. Many employees are looking forward to returning to the workplace, although this is not without apprehension regarding safety.

A 5-step checklist identifies key themes to consider in your back-to-the-office strategy and safe transition to the office.

1. Facilities & Cleaning
2. Time Management
3. Space Management
4. Communication
5. Team Behaviour

Subject to: government guidelines on working safely during coronavirus.

5 Themes

1. Facilities & Cleaning

Keeping the workplace clean is a primary consideration and necessary in order to prevent or minimise transmission by touching contaminated surfaces. The following 6 measures can help with your back-to-work plan:

I. Everyday cleaning

You may need to increase your cleaning budget and/or ensure that you're stocked up on antiviral products.

II.   Identify the high-touch areas

Contact points such as coffee machines, kettles, fridges, printers, drawer handles, and push doors can quickly spread the virus. Have disinfectant wipes next to these areas with CLEAR signs instructing 'wipe down after use'.

III.   Ensure adequate ventilation

The risk of spread via air-con is low if recycled air is kept to a minimum and fresh air intake is increased (you can check this with your facilities manager or space provider). If your employees opt to wear masks, having good air quality is even more important to ensure comfort and productivity.

IV.   Go 'contactless' or hands free

Upgrading devices to automatic light sensors, toilet flushes, soap dispensers and taps will help decrease high-touch zones.

V.   Increase storage facilities

To ensure that employees don't bring the virus in from outside, consider investing in storage boxes or lockers for personal items (bags from a commute etc.). This limits the risk of spread in the office.

VI.   Sanitise

Keep plenty of hand sanitiser around the office (at least 60% alcohol) and make sure you stock up on the mini bottles for travel to external meetings !

Shopping List

- **Hand Gel**

  Sanitiser stations
  Small mini bottles
  Disinfectant wipes - placed strategically around the office around known high-touch zones

- **Signs**

  2m floor signs for areas that have queues (tea stations, lifts, etc)
  Reminders to disinfect
  One-way directional signs

- **Spare masks** - for external meetings (for grab and go)

- **Plants** - they can help increase air quality and are aesthetically pleasing

- **Storage bins / lockers** - storage areas for belongings minimises spread. It also helps if you're introducing a rotational desk system for the first time.

2. Time Management

Many employees are worried about the commute and the idea of coming into contact with large numbers of people on office days. These simple solutions can mitigate such concerns.

Introduce "flexi-time"

Flexing your official start and finish times will allow personal to travel off-peak and avoid busy public transport. To reduce any practical issues this may cause (e.g. difficulty arranging meetings), consider introducing 'core hours' - e.g. 11-4pm - and allow people to be flexible around them.

Schedule rotational team days Calculate how many people your office can safely accommodate with the new social distancing guidelines - then create a rota, where different teams/departments come in on different days, minimising non-essential contact.

Track who is in and when

Having a simple and visible system to record who is in on which day is helpful for three main reasons:

1) If someone displays symptoms, you can alert everyone immediately
2) You can collect data on office use
3) It's easier to book meetings

3. Space Management

A few simple tweaks to the layout of your workspace can also ensure that your employees are as safe and productive as possible.

Desk layout

The Government advises that people are seated at least 2m apart. If possible, move the desks in advance, before your team are back.

Also, a back-to-back or side-to-side arrangement is much better than front-to-front. Can you make any easy adjustments? If not, consider installing temporary shields.

Corridor seats

Try to avoid seating any employees in a walkways/ circulation zones, where people pass regularly - otherwise that person could be exposed to high risk.

Optimise for purpose

What is your office space being used for right now? If individual work can be done remotely, is the office primarily a place for collaboration or meetings? If so, is it worth optimising the space, making it more spacious and safer for teamwork?

4. Communication

Ensuring that there's clear, regular, two-way communication with your team can go a long way in alleviating employees' fears - and ensure that measures you put in place are adhered to.

Communicate early

Many workers remain nervous about returning to the office - meaning it's important to communicate what you're doing to make the office safe as soon as possible, and what they need to do to contribute to this.

Repetition

You may sound like a broken record, but it's essential to keep reminding the team to follow the measures you've put in place - like the wiping down high-touch areas and the importance of sanitisation.

Track symptoms

Regularly remind your employees to monitor their symptoms, and make sure they have a designated person or email address they can alert to any changes.

Create open feedback loops

Your ultimate aim is to provide an area where your team feel comfortable and safe - so make sure you listen to what they need and want.

5. Team Behaviour

These final measures can help your employees take extra control over their and their colleagues' personal safety.

Make it easier to NOT take public transport

If you have one, publicise your Cycle to Work Scheme - as it could help your team avoid taking public transport. Alternatively, a 'steps challenge' can encourage walking to work, while helping your remote team to keep active.

Meetings and lunch breaks

When it comes to meetings, suggest that employees keep doors open where possible to help increase airflow, and remind the team that the 2m advice still applies. Encourage the team to take their lunch break outside (weather permitting!).

It's also best to discourage the use of microwaves and fridges.

Encourage good practices

Being clear around "office etiquette" can help to reduce the spread. Discourage handshaking, hugs, and fist bumps, and choose a socially distant method of greeting each other that suits your team!

Additional resources

As well as the government guidelines, you may also find the following resources useful:

- https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/office-buildings.html

- https://hbr.org/2017/03/research-stale-office-air-is-making-you-less-productive

- https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/reimagining-the-office-and-work-life-after-ovid-19#

What are your workplace options right now?

In this new, remote - friendly era of working, you may be rethinking the way your company uses office space in general. To make things simpler, we have listed three workplace options for office arrangements:

Workplace Options

We use our rightsizing tools to determine what your space is costing you and help uncover your criteria so that you can optimise your workplace strategy. We, therefore, start by analysing your lease costs and apply this metric to alternative solutions.
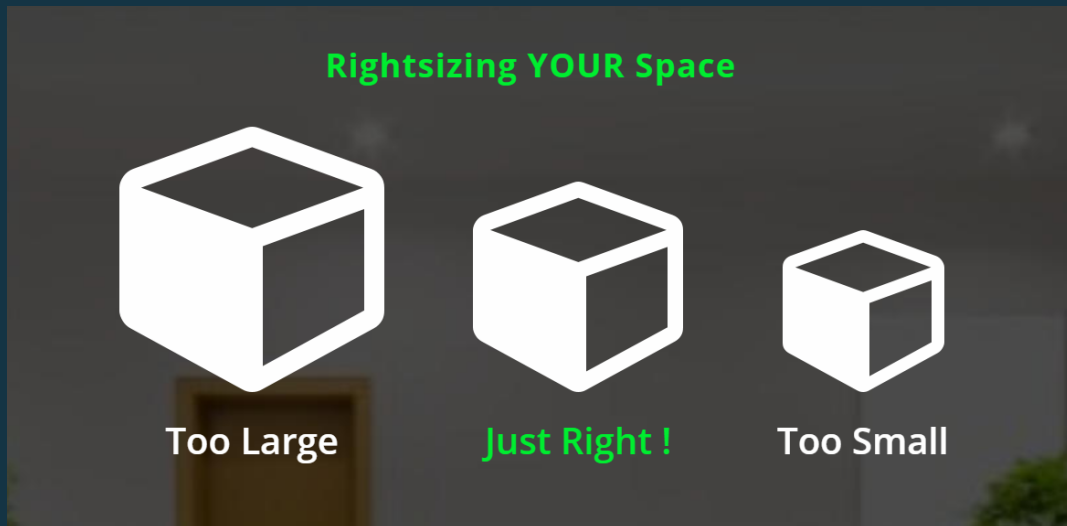
Learn More

One desk per employee is no longer a default option
Finding the best solution will require asking your employees how they want to work.

How many employees do you have ?

How many employees want to work from home ?

Do they have an adequate setup at home (Connectivity/ Desk Space / Privacy) ?

An average company may only need office space to fit 35% of their team at any one time, but this figure can vary depending on a variety of factors:

- Company size,
- Team culture, and
- Industry.

Three ways of taking office space

Once you've established your team's / companies workplace preferences, you can begin your company strategy and plan.

We recommend three approaches to place-working:

1) Full-team / time office space - leasing or flexible products
2) Hybrid, part-time or part-team space – leasing and or flexible combined with remote strategies
3) Space on-demand - flexible / co-working products

1) Full-team office space:

If the majority of your team want to be in the office the majority of the time then one desk per person would be the best option.

This is the standard bearer for taking space and there are many incentives on offer. Leaseholders are being offered extended rent-free periods. Flexible providers will consider 3-6-month arrangements on most spaces (down from 12 months minimum).

Central London Office rents are predicted to fall 30-40% over the next 18 months, so the market has some way to go before it rebalances ! Therefore, the more flexible and agile your arrangement the greater the advantage for positioning your business for better deals as the market adjusts.

2) "Hybrid", part-time or part-team space

If you're embracing remote working strategies, but still want a physical office then an office Hub or central HQ would be a worthwhile consideration. Businesses can adopt the Hybrid approach and use combinations of leasing and flexible with remote working practices. Some of the larger corporations are undertaking post code audits within their organisations to identify a remote office strategy. Workers could then work from an office without having to commute into the inner City.

If maintaining a City presence (Flexible or leasing), teams can be rotated for office working on a pre-agreed access arrangement across the company.

The full team can be in the office a few days a week, or full-time (but smaller) office space with different team members on different days. These are more complicated than the standard model, but they are workable once a system is established and automated.

This would necessitate desk sharing arrangements. This wouldn't be HOT Desking in the conventional sense because the desk will be assigned to a worker for a fixed period as opposed to rotating throughout the day. This helps with sanitation regimes and safeguarding the workplace.

Surveys have indicated that around two thirds of employees believe that their company should still have an office. If taking smaller spaces then many operators are prepared to grant additional access cards for their customers so that teams can be rotated into the same spaces. This means that companies can retain an office presence but get much better value for their money - and all employees can access the workspace as and when they need to.

In some cases, these access cards also allow use of other buildings (by brand) around London - ensuring your team can still work from an office option if they choose, without having to travel to the central Hub.

3) On-demand space:

This option is best if your employees are keen to work remotely most of the time but require access to physical environments such as meeting rooms, event spaces, or external workspace.

One way to do this is for your team to be fully remote as a default position but have access to a centralised HQ or coworking spaces. Alternatively, you could enable your team to book on-demand meeting rooms, event spaces, and hot desks as and when required.

Free advice

These are confusing times. The commercial real estate market is changing rapidly. We are in frequent contact with space providers and are constantly monitoring market developments and products. This places us in an ideal position to ensure that we can always find the best solutions for your business criteria.

If you'd like to talk to us about the options available to your company, get in touch, click here to arrange a call.