



Jelf Top tips for your first office

How to create your
perfect working space

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Most new businesses start life in a spare room or a garden shed. While it can be handy to run your new business from home to begin with, the impracticalities can soon take their toll.



Constant interruptions and lack of storage space mean many home-based ventures outgrow this environment quite quickly and a move to an office seems inevitable.

The big move to new premises should not be taken lightly. So to help you make the right decision, we talk you through ten things you need to consider when picking your first office.



Do you need an office?

The first question you need to ask yourself is ‘do I actually need an office at all?’

While moving will give you more space as well as room to meet potential clients, owning premises does also bring with it **a lot of extra costs**, so you want to be sure you are making the move for the right reasons.

Weigh up the pros and cons: Will moving help you grow? Can you afford to do it? The chances are if you feel like your current working environment is a hindrance, **a move is probably in order**, although there are ‘halfway houses’ available too if you want to test the waters.

Virtual offices are one such way to take your first tentative steps to having your own space. They offer all the communication, address and meeting room services you’d expect from a normal office without the overheads and long-term commitment. Serviced offices and shared offices are other options if you want to try before you buy, so to speak.

Serviced offices give you the chance to **grow quickly** as you aren’t tied into long contracts and can move to another premises owned by the same company at short notice. Despite the common misconception that they are expensive, serviced offices can often be more cost effective than standard office lets. **Firms such as Bruntwood** specialise in serviced offices, so it is worth having a browse to see if you can find a space that meets your needs and provides the services you require.

Shared office space is also a good option for those who want all the benefits of letting premises without having to pay the full cost. Sharing the expense with another - **hopefully complimentary** - firm can place you in the location you desire without being too much of a financial burden early on in your project. If you are moving into a space with likeminded individuals, sharing may also aid your networking and help you to make contacts and gain referrals almost instantly. **Avanta are one of many businesses** that offer shared office and hot-desking services.



Location

Although it isn’t quite as pivotal as it is for retail units, choosing the right location for your first office is also very important. While footfall isn’t really a concern, you need to be close enough to train and bus stations so clients travelling from further afield can **find you easier**, and to make it more straightforward for employees to get to and from the office too.

Local amenities are also useful – while pitching up on a cheap industrial estate a few miles out of the city centre may be great for the bank balance, you may struggle to attract top-level employees. They are likely to want to work in areas where there are decent lunch options and places to socialise after work, so try and factor this into your decision if possible.

One good way to choose a the perfect location for your first office is to see where competitors and **related businesses are located**, and try and move into a similar area. This will further improve your networking opportunities, while also going some way to establishing a “hub” for your industry in a chosen area.

Obviously if your first office is just going to house yourself and a couple of members of staff, and you plan on moving to another, larger premises fairly soon afterwards, then this isn’t as much of a concern.

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Building

Although the aesthetics of your first office shouldn't be right at the top of your list of priorities when you move, you don't want to discount this aspect completely.

If you are working in the creative or digital sectors, your clients will probably expect you to be working in a **suitably cool and creative space** – think beams and exposed brickwork. However, this isn't a necessity for everyone.

For your first office, you simply need it to be housed in a building that provides a secure and comfortable

working environment. It doesn't need to have any bells or whistles, but simply give you an area to work **peacefully and entertain** both potential and existing clients. Think practically about what you really need when choosing your first office and you should be fine.

Buildings with receptionist facilities may be an attractive proposition however, as for a small subsidy you will gain access to a receptionist who will greet visitors and give your operation an extra air of professionalism.

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Legal information

While it may seem like a relatively simple process, office **contract agreements** are full of tricky terms and conditions to get your head around, so keeping your wits about you is a must.

For leases and freeholds on conventional spaces, it is best practice to have a solicitor involved. These are usually quite complex and complicated agreements, and can **take up to three months** to be finalised. Therefore if you are renting this type of space, you can expect to have to pay quite a lot for the privilege, and not expect to be moving in overnight.

Potentially, a quicker and cheaper option for you would be to choose a **serviced office agreement**. They are usually less complex, and while as with any other piece of documentation you need to read it very carefully, they do not usually necessitate a solicitor to be present. Also, **choosing an office provider** that explains things in a clear and concise manner and is willing to answer any questions you may have in plain English is also a bonus - the last thing you want is to be bombarded with confusing legal jargon.

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Service Providers

One of the big draws for many when moving from the home into a new office space is that they will potentially gain access to professional services such as business **phone systems and faster broadband** than they would at home. However, such services do come with certain caveats.

Most service providers – especially for communications – only deal in long-term contracts, and charge lofty amounts to those wishing to break contract. If you are testing the waters with your first office, committing to a 24-month contract is not a great idea. It is **best practice to shop around** all of your available options, taking into account not only monthly and installation costs but also the procedure

and charges should you need to bring the agreement to a premature end.

Additionally, before committing, it is worth speaking to neighbouring offices to see which providers they use, and if they have any **speed or latency issues**. There is nothing worse than agreeing to a long-term contract only to find out that, once installed, it is not fast enough to meet demand.

Should you be able to have control over the providers, it is also worth shopping around for other utilities such as **electricity and gas** to make sure you are getting the best deal.



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Expansion

Before finalising any contract, you need to consider your future requirements. No doubt if you have a strong business plan, you will already have planned **where you want to be** in one, three, and five years' time. Therefore, any contract you sign needs to take into account your growth projections.

Although this may sound obvious, many people sign up for a two-year lease on an office when they plan on doubling their headcount within a year, meaning they will need to move to a larger premises.

One way to get round this is to lease your first space from a firm that owns many differently-sized offices.

This way, **should you need to expand** before you expect to, they will likely be able to move you into one of their larger vacant offices without having to break the original contract.

If this option isn't available to you, renting a larger office than you need and **subletting some** of the space could be a viable option. If you intend to do this, make sure you discuss it with your letting agent first to make sure you are legally allowed to do so.



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Equipment

Once you have decided on your new home, you need to think about kitting it out. As with fitting any workspace, filling an office with electrical equipment and furniture **isn't cheap**. Therefore, you need to make sure anything you buy represents good value.

Your first port of call should be **local classified ads** for job lots of used office equipment. As other small businesses close or move premises, they are likely

to want to get rid of their previous furniture quickly and cheaply, so you may be able to strike lucky and get everything you need in one fell swoop at a bargain price.

There are also many **services such as Lyreco** that specialise in helping you fit out your new office space quickly and easily, although they are obviously not quite as cheap as second-hand sales.



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Design

Although you don't want to go overboard, it is important **not to overlook the effect** the design of your office can have on your employees' productivity and the look and feel of your brand. Cheap furniture will make your brand look cheap, so while you don't want to be spending thousands of pounds on bespoke office chairs, a sense of balance will help.

Grey furniture and fluorescent lighting in cramped conditions are not going to be conducive to people

being motivated to work well for you. Try and keep your space as open as possible, and, if possible, try and create some areas where both you and your staff can have a bit of **quiet and privacy if needed**.

Giving your staff some autonomy over the look and feel of their personal workspace can also help them to feel **more comfortable** while in the office, so try and consider ways that you can make this so.

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Insurance

Although offices are usually safe working environments, it is best practice to be covered **should an accident happen.**

As you are likely to have external people in the office for meetings or pitches, **Public Liability insurance** is recommended. This will protect you should they suffer any injury while on your premises. If you already have people working for you then you probably already know about Employers Liability but if not and you plan to expand your workforce then it's a legal requirement that you have cover in place to protect your employees against injury or illness.

As mentioned above, offices are also full to the brim with expensive equipment such as laptops and printers, that could cause all manner of problems should they be broken, damaged or stolen. Electrical

Equipment insurance will mean that again you are covered should these events happen. Computer Breakdown cover will also protect you should your server fall over and you need to get someone out quickly to help it back onto its feet again.

As you are most likely to be renting your first office, **Tenants Improvements insurance** is also very handy if you want to add things like partition walls, while Buildings insurance will protect the building itself.

Businesses can also lose a great deal of money should some kind of insured mishap mean normal service is interrupted for any period of time. In such instances, Business Interruption insurance will mean that any loss of earnings will be covered too.



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Staff

Finally, **the key to a great office environment** is the people in it. You want to employ people that are not only able to fulfil the requirements of the role advertised, but will also help to create a nice, positive working environment.

Sites such as SmallBusiness.co.uk cover the subject of employing staff in great depth and are great resources to help you get the right individuals for you.

In general though, you want to find out as much as you can during the interview process to ensure they are the **right fit for your business.** Although you may be presented with a very charismatic candidate, you don't want to employ someone based on a strong face-to-face interview only to learn on their second day that they have a very poor grasp of written English when you require them to send many emails to clients. Therefore, vigorous testing is highly recommended.