

RENOVATION AND THE CONSTRUCTION MANAGER: SOONER IS BETTER



By, Steve Craft

So, you need a new office. You've run the numbers and realize that the cost of constructing a new building is too much and your best financial option is to renovate an existing building. What's the next step? Many owners will identify an available building, hire an architect to draw up plans, and figure that's enough, but it's not. The most critical step— one that is often ignored— is to bring on an experienced Construction Manager as soon as possible, preferably to help with the due diligence of selecting a new location.

Fact-finding and assessment studies can add expense at the beginning of the project and many owners are hesitant to pay the money for this. But, doing so can provide important information that will help avoid very costly problems further on in the project. Renovations present many more potential pitfalls than new construction due to existing conditions that must be integrated into the new design. A knowledgeable CM can provide more than just budget estimates. A CM with experience performing complex renovations will know what to look for and what questions to ask. A CM can supply valuable insights with their expertise on:

- *How new systems will fit in an existing space*
- *Building and logistical constraints before spending a lot of money on design*
- *The Cost/Benefit analysis of system options*
- *The Cost/Benefit analysis of repairing or renovating existing building components versus removing them and starting anew*
- *A single, comprehensive construction plan from the start (less costly in the long-run than tackling individual issues and systems piecemeal)*
- *Producing a realistic project occupancy date*

MEP Systems

Most major building renovations involve installing new or upgraded mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP) systems and there are vital factors that need to be considered before selecting a system. A qualified CM will assess the building's roof and floor loading capacity and make recommendations based on any code required seismic bracing and the ease of reinforcing the existing roof structure. The CM will help the Owner and the Architect determine whether existing floor to structure heights provide sufficient room while affording acceptable ceiling heights. And, perhaps most importantly, a good Construction Manager will be able to assist in deciphering the existing electrical systems. In many older buildings, the electrical service is often added to over and over again without any documentation— so the system is convoluted and not easily adaptable to new requirements. The CM can help break that electrical system down and figure out what feeds what and how to best design for new electrical requirements.

Renovating Occupied Spaces

Renovating in an occupied space brings special challenges. The construction team can't just come in and start shutting down systems and knocking down walls. The building must remain operational while the construction is ongoing and this means maintaining the current HVAC, electrical, and life safety systems while simultaneously installing new ones. Above all, the safety and comfort of the tenants are the most important things to consider. The CM must be vigilant about controlling dust, vibration, and noise to avoid disturbing the occupants of the building. Also, safe access to the building and convenient parking must be maintained while the building is being reconfigured. The CM is most capable to develop creative plans that mitigate the impact on occupants and the construction process cost effectively. They can perform important cost/benefit analyses that allow the owner to make informed decisions about whether to evacuate the building and temporarily relocate operations during renovation or maintain occupancy and co-exist with the construction activities.

The logistics of a building

renovation can be very complex and risky. There are so many unknowns when working in an existing space. It's those unknowns that make performing the proper due diligence with a qualified Construction Manager essential for proper site selection and good decision-making.

Author's Biography:

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