

Ebook

Commercial Office: 7 Keys to a Successful Post-COVID Workplace

Introduction

For the past year, many urban CRE office buildings have been in hibernation, sitting largely empty as teams work from home. But now that COVID-19 vaccines are making a return to normal life seem possible, workers are considering how and when they can return to their offices.

This leaves commercial property teams with one big question:

What comes next?

Only one thing is certain: It won't be back to business as usual.

The massive remote work experiment forced by COVID-19 has been successful, at least enough so that many tenants are rethinking how they use their office spaces.

As office workers return to their buildings, they'll be looking to property management to help them navigate their changing needs and get the best outcomes from their spaces.

To meet their expectations and survive in CRE's next phase, property managers need to be more flexible than ever. This means finding tools that enable flexible resource allocation, flexible space layouts, flexible leasing terms and flexible thinking – since nobody knows exactly what this next phase will look like.

And since today's CRE teams are increasingly dispersed, you need tools to help your team work efficiently from wherever they are, keeping them on track to meet SLAs and deliver tenant service that makes them want to stay in your buildings. Especially since your office buildings have a surprising new competitor: The comfort and convenience of the home office.

Read on to learn how you can use your building operations [platform](#) to transition your property into a workplace of the future, and to adapt when things change on a dime.

7 Keys to a Successful Post-COVID Workplace

- ✔ Faster Leasing
- ✔ Flex Space Offerings
- ✔ Secure Visitor Access
- ✔ Resource Reservation
- ✔ Transparent HVAC Management
- ✔ Consistent Tenant Communication
- ✔ Mobile Workflow Access

Streamline Your Leasing

In 2021, even the most in-demand buildings are facing unprecedented vacancy rates.

While you can't prevent economic uncertainty and changing tenant preferences, you can shore up your leasing process to keep vacancies short.

This starts by powering your leasing team to manage, market and lease each vacancy more efficiently.

With a modern space management solution, you can mitigate vacancies with interactive visualizations of expiring leases. See how much SF is rolling over, when it's happening, and even segment the information by building, floor, or tenant. This visibility gives your property team an opportunity to contact tenants and resolve any issues that might be propelling them to leave. If that fails, you can proactively kick your marketing into high gear.

The right platform will also give your team central access to marketable floor plans that can be retrieved easily to show new prospects their possibilities. On their end, brokers can automatically generate a standard leasing plan or a custom-designed marketing sheet based on the specific scenario that will close each deal. This eliminates time spent waiting on architects to turn around modified plans (time in which your prospects could be finding other options) and keeps your leasing deals moving.

For tenants or prospects who are uncomfortable with in-person meetings, create and send virtual test fits of different office layouts to show them the possibilities.

These features protect your portfolio from long vacancies during an uncertain time for the CRE industry.

Pandemic Impact on Lease Renewals

- 54% of tenants say their revenue has decreased since COVID hit
- 22% asked management for rent relief
- Only 33% of tenants expect 80+% occupancy by June 1st, 2021

Source: [US Commercial Real Estate Re-Occupancy Plans and Priorities](#)

The Future of Flex Spaces

A rise in remote work is reducing the need for physical office spaces and many tenants have been forced to lay off staff members. Reduced headcounts = less space needed.

On the flip side of the coin, some tenants are adding more space per employee to promote social distancing. While space per person pre-pandemic was [trending smaller](#) (75 SF per person), this number will likely go up to 150 SF+ per person during re-occupancy.

COVID-19 has also dramatically accelerated flexible space trends. Why? These spaces are easy to acquire (and to leave in a hurry), foster a needed sense of community, and support portfolio reductions and other cost-saving strategies amid economic uncertainty.

In fact, an estimated [30% of all office space](#) will be consumed flexibly by 2030.

How can you accommodate tenant requests for flexible spaces and diverse layouts?

It helps to have an easy way to edit and annotate current floorplans to show tenants their options quickly. (Again, cloud-based [space management](#) tools can help here!) After alterations are made, ensure sure that any modified spaces are [measured accurately to the latest building measurement standards](#), leaving no potential revenue untapped.

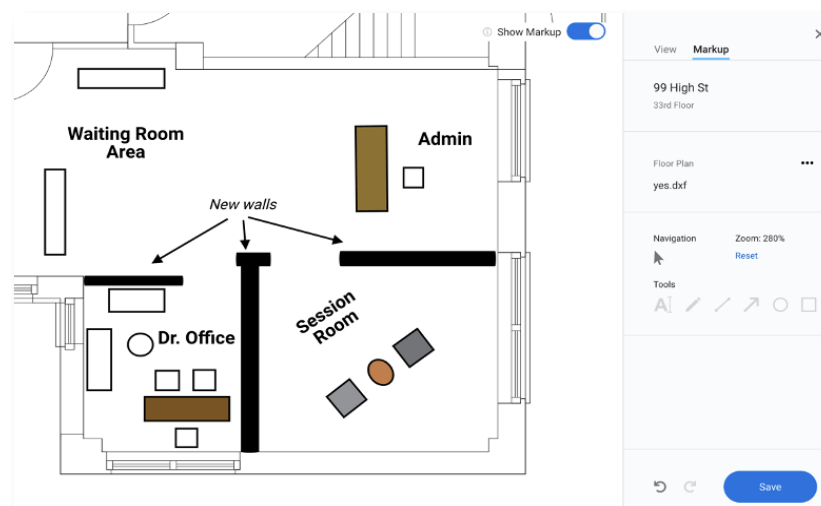
Creating the right portfolio mix of flex and traditional spaces might also include working with a partner like [FastOffice](#) to incorporate suite changes to your existing space, and to lease and furnish flex spaces fast. [Agilquest](#) is another option that powers flex seating within a tenant suite, offering booking and utilization analytics to help you make informed decisions about your space offerings.

Early signs indicate that flex might be the future of CRE. Thus, your portfolio's success in the new normal depends on how well your team can adapt to this trend and offer tenants the flexibility they need.

Meet Your Tenants' Evolving Space Needs

- ✓ 20% are looking for more office space per employee
- ✓ 42% are reducing their workplace occupancy
- ✓ 59% are planning for an increase in telecommuting

Source: [US Commercial Real Estate Reoccupancy Plans and Priorities](#)



Make Spaces and Amenities Reservable

As many companies transition to flexible work models and some downgrade office sizes, reservable coworking spaces (conference rooms rooftops, etc.) are expected to be in high demand.

To ensure that handoff is seamless and your team has time to follow cleaning protocols between guests, it's important to schedule these resources accurately.

To start, make coworking spaces and shared resources (like service elevators and loading docks) reservable, with minimal admin lift on your team.

[Resource reservation software](#) enables tenants with self-service reservations of amenities and spaces. Tenants can easily view and book spaces and amenities through an online service portal, freeing up your team's administrative time.

Best of all? Administrators can set hourly and daily rates, and easily generate accurate invoices that capture all revenue opportunities associated with each reservation.



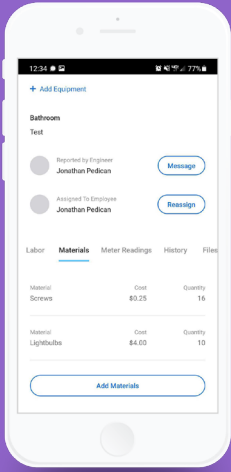
Offer Remote Access to Important Workflows

Tenants expect service levels in your building to stay consistent, despite the many logistical challenges caused by COVID-19. And now that property teams are more spread out than ever before (with some working in other buildings, some working remotely, etc.) they need tools that let them work optimally from anywhere.

That's why teams need mobile apps that keep them on the same page and on track to meet tenant service requests. This functionality is perhaps most important for engineers, who spend their days moving throughout your buildings (including areas with no service). Rather than wasting time running back and forth to their desks to check for updates and send messages to your team and tenants, they need important information at their fingertips.

Luckily, [engineer-focused mobile applications](#) are now available to ensure that your team can respond to work orders, see real-time task updates and communicate with your team and tenants from anywhere.

Technology like this helps engineers adhere to SLAs and consistently exceed tenant expectations – which can often be the difference between keeping and losing a tenant.



See how you can mobile-enable your engineers and tenants to deliver best-in-class service.

[Learn more](#)

Predicting Post-Pandemic Occupancy Trends

- ✓ The number of days worked remotely is expected to double from 1.2 days pre-pandemic to 2.4 days a week post-pandemic.
- ✓ 72% of employees want to continue working from home post-pandemic
- ✓ The majority want to work from home an average of 2 days a week

[JLL, November 2020](#)

Implement Safe Visitor Protocols

With disease transmission still a concern, your tenants may be wary of strangers coming and going from their buildings, or of crowds forming in shared spaces.

The most obvious area of concern is your lobby, where manual guest check-in processes can lead to long lines (not to mention frustrated tenants who are kept waiting).

To alleviate their concerns and protect your building from a disease outbreak, you need a fast, effective way to manage your building's visitors. The easiest answer is to implement a [visitor access solution](#) that gives guests a smooth experience in your building, from entry to exit.

Allowing visitors to pre-register and be pre-cleared by security can eliminate crowds in your lobbies by getting guests to their designated suites faster.

For enhanced visibility, your staff can quickly capture important visitor information (including names and photos) at the point of check-in. This is essential to keep your tenants safe in normal times, but during re-occupancy, this feature can be used to contact prior visitors in the event of an outbreak in your building. And if you need to get information to visitors fast, communication channels are available to reach all current property guests or all visitors from a certain date.

Knowing who is in your building at all times provides a better experience to tenants and their guests, and shows them that their safety is a priority.

The screenshot displays a visitor management system interface with the following components:

- Search Filters:**
 - Visit Date Range: MM/DD/YYYY to MM/DD/YYYY
 - Check-In Date Range: MM/DD/YYYY to MM/DD/YYYY
 - Check-Out Date Range: MM/DD/YYYY to MM/DD/YYYY
 - Vendor Company: Choose Company
 - Company Visiting: Choose Company
 - Created By: Choose Creator
 - Created Date Range: MM/DD/YYYY to MM/DD/YYYY
 - Status: Scheduled (selected), Checked In, Checked Out, requested for
 - Choose Contact: Choose Contact
- Table of Visitors:**

Actions	Visitor Name	Status	Company Visiting	Requested For	Date	Instructions
Check Out	Jody Saarmaa	Checked In	Bryn's Dev	Brynn Hogan	11/10/2020	Instructional!
Check Out	Melinda Collins Building Engineers	Checked Out	Bryn's Dev	Brynn Hogan	12/09/2020	
Check Out	Minsup Ko Building Engineers	Checked Out	Bryn's Dev	Brynn Hogan	12/09/2020	Show him to the suite please
Check Out	Julia Blue	Checked In	Bryn's Dev	Brynn Hogan	12/11/2020	

Easily keep track of check-ins, badges, and check-out status for all building guests.

Alleviate Air Quality Concerns

Since COVID-19 is an airborne virus, air quality is now top of mind for tenants and prospects considering a possible return to your office space.

This puts your HVAC system (and how well you manage it!) into the spotlight. In fact, [80% of tenants](#) are more likely to inquire about HVAC and air quality right now.

To alleviate their concerns and encourage re-occupancy, you need clear, transparent HVAC data that proves you're doing your job to keep them safe. This can range from changing filters regularly, conducting scheduled maintenance, installing high-efficiency air filters, etc. But manually hunting down this data (which sometimes isn't there because maintenance wasn't recorded properly) is time-consuming. And if you come up empty or with incomplete information, your tenants might rethink re-occupancy or sign a lease elsewhere.

For better visibility into a notoriously complex system, try an [HVAC management solution](#) that keeps each HVAC unit's full maintenance history in one place, along with a digitized view of all HVAC inventory. Your team will be prompted by regular maintenance reminders to ensure that no tasks are missed, maximizing the lifespan of your unit. When your unit does need repairs, tap into a robust vendor network to find quality vendors at more competitive prices – rather than going with the familiar choice that charges an arm and a leg.

To avoid any interruptions in tenant air quality, your team can use ASHRAE life expectancy scores allow you to predict your unit's end of life – and budget accordingly.



Understand Tenant HVAC Expectations in 2021

- 89% of tenants want PMs to implement high-efficiency particulate air filters.
- Only 4% of tenants are requesting an upgrade or full replacement of their systems
- 81% of property managers plan to implement enhanced air filtration

Source: [The Evolving Importance of Effective HVAC Management](#)

Improve Tenant Communications

In times of turmoil like a global pandemic, your tenants will look to you for guidance.

The past year showed us the importance that tenants place on regular communication from management. For example, [46% of tenants](#) who rated their building communications as “excellent” during COVID-19 said they are more likely to renew leases.

While future disruptions like fires, floods or security breaches are unavoidable, poor building communications and disengaged tenants can be prevented.

To keep tenants informed on what’s happening in their buildings, try engaging with tenants through their preferred channels (text, email or Slack). This can help ensure that they’ll never miss an important message or feel out of the loop.

With a solid building communications plan in place, you can keep tenant communication consistent, no matter the circumstances.



Conclusion

While COVID-19 upended the CRE industry as we know it, this doesn't mean that property owners and operators need to throw out their playbooks. Many keys to their success pre-pandemic have been essential in navigating this challenging time, and will be crucial during what comes next. Above all, it's clear that **good management matters**. Specifically that timely communications, strong team collaboration and flexible thinking are key to your portfolio's success.

As property teams know, many challenges lie ahead, including the fact that your buildings now need to provide what home offices can't – flexible coworking spaces, attractive amenities and first-rate tenant service.

To deliver a modern workplace that's in line with tenant expectations, you need a building operations platform that lets you be flexible and responsive to change while managing your properties, people, and resources.

That's where Building Engines comes in.

We can help you prepare for whatever comes next because we've seen it all – over the past 20 years of leading the CRE industry forward with innovative building operations solutions.



Learn how our latest platform, Prism, can help your team thrive in CRE's next phase by scheduling time with our team of experts.

[Request a demo of Prism](#)

About Building Engines

For over 20 years, Building Engines has delivered on its mission to help customers improve NOI, increase revenue, reduce operating expenses and deliver greater tenant satisfaction. Building Engines is trusted by hundreds of commercial real estate organizations who manage billions of square feet. With our latest release, Prism, Building Engines is reaching a new level of building operations innovation. Prism comes equipped to help you exceed today's goals while preparing you and your team to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Exceptional Building Operations. Extraordinary Business Outcomes.



ADDRESS

Building Engines HQ
33 Arch Street, 32nd Floor
Boston, MA 02110