Conduct your own filing and storage audit.
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Filing & Storage:
From Wasted Space to Workable Solutions

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Filing and storage systems hold the contents for business success and serve as conduits to productivity. Proper storage is also essential for compliance and security issues.

Despite the impact records management and document storage can have on an organization’s productivity and subsequently its profits, it’s generally among the last issues addressed during workspace planning.

Moreover, traditional filing systems inadvertently encourage wasted space and thus no longer support the increasingly cost-conscious 21st century business environment. Nor do they reflect the current sustainable movement to protect the earth’s environment.

Given the rise in real estate costs and the potential gains of smarter filing and storage solutions, today’s businesses can benefit from an advanced planning process, one that audits the ways information is managed, introduces cost saving techniques and offers design ideas to enhance valuable space.

In addition, a new class of versatile products that support this intelligent audit-driven approach can provide organizations with solutions better suited for achieving workplace efficiencies.

This paper presents ways companies can combine intelligent planning with flexible product solutions to improve document retrieval efficiencies, enhance workflows and aesthetics, and maximize productivity and investments.
INTRODUCTION

Filing and storage are the unsung heroes in any business environment. Viewed as essential but seldom exciting, the typical workplace solutions go mostly unnoticed—that is, until they become woefully inadequate.

From overstuffed cabinets to overflowing shelves, such shortcomings can occur rapidly and frequently. Little wonder then that storage is the most frequently reconfigured workstation component.

Despite the advent of the computer and predictions of the paperless office, the realities are that filing and storage needs have only grown, not diminished. Personal computers populate every desk, and yet more technology has seemingly led to more paper usage overall.

Those individuals faced with the day-to-day challenges of facility management are often bound by rising real estate and facility operations costs, increased employment numbers, space limitations and mountains of paper waiting for archival.

For today’s facilities managers and employers one persistent question resurfaces time and again: Where can we store all the information our organization needs, as well as the information it doesn’t immediately need?

The answers are not easily derived as many variables factor into a filing and storage equation.

For one, facilities managers must often maintain prescribed workplace standards. They must accommodate specific workstation sizes with exacting square footage, lineal inches of workspace, and fixed storage space allocated to each employee. Give in to one employee’s request for an additional file cabinet and a myriad of unwelcome workplace issues will most assuredly follow.

At the same time, the employer seeks to control expenses, manage costs-per-employee, and improve worker output. Workplace productivity is often a key corporate objective, with employee activities measured and tied to bottom-line results.
This kind of efficiency scrutiny is seldom applied to filing and storage solutions, although it should be—system choices can have a profound and costly impact on productivity. Disorganization can cost dearly; the average cost of searching for just one misfiled document is $120.¹

Storage challenges are further compounded when businesses rely on traditional filing systems. Such systems comprise sizes and features that reveal built-in waste to impede efficiencies and confound cost-containment efforts.

One shared aim of the facilities manager and the employer is the desire to ensure employee satisfaction, thereby increasing workplace productivity. This is a crucial challenge given that inadequate storage and filing space continues to rank in the top 10 office complaints by employees.²

Additionally, demographic changes in the workplace are creating new storage requirements as younger and wired workers expect secured storage for laptops, PDAs, mobile tools and other tech gadgets, as well as personal wardrobe storage needs. Given that 36 percent of worksurface space is now occupied by computers, monitors and other electronic equipment³, efficient storage becomes all the more important.

Other changes in the modern workplace include the growing prominence of less traditional spaces to accommodate more flexible forms of work and offices, such as teaming, collaboration, cross-functional workers, virtual offices, hoteling and other practices promoting shared workspaces.

By assertively managing active and archival storage within the workplace, organizations can support both a satisfied and productive workforce. To ensure success, efforts must start early with comprehensive and upfront planning, concurrent with all other facets of workplace planning.

As part of the intelligent planning process, organizations should addresses four key concerns: real-estate costs, wasted space, accessibility and an environmental response.
THE SHRINKING OFFICE FOOTPRINT:
Balancing Real-Estate Allocation Against Overall Cost

One of the major cash-flow components of any business operation is the capital required for buying or leasing commercial space. What’s more, real-estate costs are the second largest indirect operating expenditure for most companies.

Although real-estate costs are factored into operating expenses, most companies fail to actively manage those costs. Nor do they align real estate decisions with an overall business strategy. Such costs have a very real impact on a company’s business strategy and affects business decisions, a concept that’s often overlooked by organizations. Commercial real estate, therefore, becomes a “glaring item on every financial report.”

Most experts agree that strategically planning the real estate process can provide companies with greater opportunities for cost savings. Whether a business is in the high-rent district of Manhattan or just outside a small town in the Midwest, real-estate allocation per employee can be a tricky undertaking that can also vary by industry.

In any event, most business owners aim to reduce their office footprints, and space planners and designers are consistently challenged to layout effective and usable workspaces. This is particularly true in a post-downsizing era. Facility management responsibilities are no longer centered on downsizing assets and closing buildings.

Instead, space allocation has taken on a new focus, that of using space more effectively and efficiently, not just making do with less.

In light of a shrinking footprint philosophy, the current strategy is to design small spaces that are also smart and highly functional. As such, traditional filing systems consisting of an array of 12" drawers within pedestal and lateral file standards do little to support smaller, smarter workspaces.

Vanishing, too, are traditional workstations with high panels that support overhead storage, as well as taller storage pieces. As real estate comes at a premium and workplaces move to teaming and collaborative environments, the typical 66" high paneled workstation that can accommodate a five-high lateral file is quickly becoming extinct.
Panel heights are being lowered to keep workstation costs down, increase natural light, and promote employee collaboration. As a result, the storage that’s typically available in panel-hung overheads is no longer feasible. Additionally, taller storage pieces no longer fit aesthetically within short-paneled workspaces. Employees are left to file “more with less.”

The loss of traditional storage elements requires employers to provide more efficient means for modern filing and storage needs.

REVOLUTIONIZING REAL ESTATE SPACE, INCH BY PRECIOUS INCH

In response to increased real-estate costs and decreased space availability, a new design focus has emerged. The trend is to analyze filing and storage elements for their ability to maximize storage efficiency and minimize the actual number of units needed in a work environment. Designers committed to these smart storage trends are indeed finding products that satisfy these newly defined needs.

Lateral files, towers and cabinets built on a 1.5" module result in the ability to request specific space openings to match specific media types, thus enabling a more succinct planning strategy (ref. la). For instance, if a standard Pendaflex® folder fits inside a 10.5" drawer (and it does), then it seems pointless to specify the traditional 12" drawer that will result in unusable inside space and take up valuable office space.

Using 10.5" drawers instead of 12" lets organizations reclaim valuable real estate (ref. lb). Multiply a single 10.5" drawer five times over and a company instantly gains 20 percent more storage in the same existing square footage versus using 12" drawers. This also allows organizations to preserve space within the existing office footprint.

Other products, such as compact storage, aim to maximize square-foot capacity by minimizing the space required for multiple aisles in archival spaces. Also known as high-density mobile storage, this type of product features movable aisle ways in a row of
shelving units to provide ad hoc access to the mobilized units, yielding quick access to documents as needed.

With more than 28 percent of all office furnishings expenditures typically spent on storage equipment ix, and space at a premium in most industries, compact storage is a smart solution. It reduces space needs, which in turn can minimize a building’s total volume and reduce construction costs, as well as save energy and reduce operating costs over the life of the building.

Other smart solutions are receding doors that are 13.5" to 15". These effectively support binder storage and provide a resourceful solution to the loss of overhead storage space due to lowered panel heights.

**MINIMIZING UNUSABLE STORAGE SPACE**

Driving out waste is the efficiency mantra for many of today’s organizations, and yet most companies should look no further than in their own storage solutions to find waste in the form of unusable space.
Unusable space is often the by-product of most traditional filing and storage systems. In fact, the majority of storage elements found within the workplace are constructed on a very basic and somewhat outdated module. They consist of 12” drawer and door elements on lateral files, and personal pedestals of 3”, 6”, and 12” drawers. This module is ripe with inefficiencies as any facilities manager can attest.

For example, open any 12” receding door atop every five-high lateral file and one will typically find many of them either empty or full of casual “junk.” Standard binders are taller than 12”, thus do not fit, rendering the space useless.

Workplace planning conducted early can successfully address issues of unusable storage space and should include a comprehensive audit-driven approach. By approaching storage and filing from the “inside out,” the audit of a company’s current practices can illustrate areas of inefficiencies and aid in the development of more highly functional solutions.

The focus throughout the audit process is keenly targeted on one simple question: What do users need to store? Surprisingly, the answer is often much more than letter or legal-sized paper.

That’s because the way information is managed, classified, stored and retrieved has evolved in recent years. A detailed analysis of media types, classification, retention and knowledge management practices can help organizations meet space demands and minimize unusable space. In fact, media-specific units that house CDs for example, require even more upfront planning on the parts of both end users and designers. Here again the guiding question is what do users need to store?

The advent of products built to support specific workplace designs and functions has made minimizing unusable space an even easier task to accomplish. Some noteworthy examples include:

**Personal storage towers.** Employers cognizant of the effects a shrinking workspace can have on employee morale can opt to provide more personal storage spaces (ref. 2a). In lieu of universal storage closets that hold community coats, bags and boots, personal storage towers have become an increasingly popular choice.

Built to match cubicle wall heights between 48” and 66” high, these three-in-one units can be placed at each workstation to provide pedestal and bookcase storage,
as well as lockable wardrobe space for personal effects. Not only does providing the 24" wide x 24" deep units please individual workers and reduce unusable space, the move also frees up communal spaces for other critical office uses.

Lateral files featuring 10.5" drawer size. The emergence of a 10.5" drawer size that neatly fits standard Pendaflex folders is providing end users with more flexibility in lateral file planning and eliminating more unusable space.

For example:
A five-high lateral file with 12" drawers (or four drawers and one receding door) is 63.5" high. In a standard lateral file, the top drawer is often useless because a taller end-user height is needed to access the top drawer. By contrast, using 10.5" drawers, a lateral file could be configured in a number of more usable ways.

- Specify five 10.5" drawers for a total height of 55.5" high, putting most users in easy reach of the top drawer.
- Specify four 10.5" drawers and one 13" or 15" receding door for adequate bookcase storage at a reachable height. This option can eliminate the need for personal overhead storage within the workplace.

Media-specific storage, multiple drawer sizes.
Other drawer sizes have become available in recent years in response to media-specific storage needs (ref. 2b). Six-inch drawers are ideal for CD storage, 9" drawers are perfect for DVDs, while 13" and 15" drawers can fit binders and oversized media, such as x-rays. As always, 3" drawers make great personal effects storage such as pens, paper and paperclips.
Lateral files built in 1.5" increments allow multiple drawer and door sizes throughout similar sized cabinets. This capability for multiple configurations allows companies to combine elements and accommodate their exact needs.

With versatile options like the ones outlined here, companies can increase storage capacity, add storage solutions, reduce unusable space, optimize information management, and still decrease the amount of space needed.

ACCESSIBILITY: ACTIVE FILING VS. ARCHIVAL STORAGE

Over the past few decades, two types of paper management have been commonplace within office environments—piling and filing. Employees have freely managed paperwork in their own ways, often keeping active documents in piles on their desks, eventually filing away documents deemed no longer necessary to their short-term responsibilities.

Neither approach has proven ideal and both have their failings, including poor accessibility to information. It’s estimated that knowledge workers spend 15 to 30 percent of their work time looking for information. Additionally, the typical organization of 1,000 knowledge workers wastes $6 million to $12 million per year “searching for nonexistent information, failing to find existing information, or recreating information that can’t be found.”

Likewise, storage inefficiencies abound when five members of a single project team all store the same pieces of information in their own workspaces instead of communally sharing documents stored in a central archival point.

This reflects a long tradition of space planning and storage whereby every worker is allocated the same personal space. In today’s era of cross-functional teams and churn (high percentages of staff moving within the office structure), this conventional approach makes little sense. In addition to filing duplications, moving storage pieces from workstation to workstation each time a worker, unit, or department is moved is costly.
Clearly, today’s organizations must be far more efficient. Companies that seek success strive to be quicker in all activities and initiatives—quicker to bring products to market, quicker to communicate, quicker to share information.

Planners and users intent on supporting speed and maximizing workplace output can help their organizations realize a competitive advantage simply by improving filing processes. By properly managing both active and archival storage, an organization can minimize document retrieval time, increase productivity, and maximize space usage. Prudent management must also ensure that documents are stored safely and securely.

In addition to productivity gains, enlightened facilities managers further recognize that significant financial gains can also be achieved through better storage and filing methods. Personnel costs, floor space costs, costs associated with churn, productivity and speed of information retrieval can all be dramatically reduced. The best organizations learn to balance the needs of active storage, shared storage, and archival storage throughout their workspaces. To do so, however, they must first identify the distinctions between each classification of storage as it relates to their specific business practices and environments.

**AUDIT DRIVEN APPROACH**

The best way to determine which contents and documents are considered active, which are deemed suitable for sharing, and what and when to archive is by conducting an audit that is focused on how employees work. In an audit, the various working practices that exist within an organization and the storage needs of each are examined.

For instance, a company may have workers assigned to dedicated workspaces with storage requirements that accompany such ownership of space. Or it may have flex environments in which workers have no assigned or regular stations and instead share storage solutions. In reality, companies comprise a combination of many working practices, styles and preferences.

The typical organization of 1,000 knowledge workers wastes $6 million to $12 million per year “searching for nonexistent information, failing to find existing information, or recreating information that can’t be found.”
Through the audit process, employers learn which documents are meant for individual use (active/personal), which are appropriate for sharing (shared/team), and how much time is needed for given projects before documents can be formally archived in outlying spaces apart from work areas (archival/bulk).

A review of “needs” rather than “wants” can further ensure that only the filing required within the day-to-day workspace has adequate storage provided for it.

**Active/Personal.** From towers and pedestals, to lockers and overhead files, storage for individual workspaces should appropriately reflect working practices. Dedicated workspaces, for instance, will have efficient storage solutions placed directly in the workstation footprint. In contrast, flex workers may rely on lockers, mobile storage or individually locked drawers within team areas, facilitating easy migration between workstations.

Filing pieces built to support multiple functions can provide excellent solutions for active and personal storage. Three-in-one towers with paper filing, bookcase storage and personal wardrobe not only support efficiencies but also enhance worker satisfaction (ref. 3a).

Ultimate productivity within active storage space will also depend on accessibility to active working documents in the quickest amount of time with the least amount of effort. Maximum cost savings will depend on versatility, flexibility and expandability.

**Shared/Team.** Shared filing within reach supports teamwork, reduces duplication and improves efficiency (ref. 3b). Uniform file media increases the flexibility of selected team spaces. This means new groups can be mobilized or relocated with minimum downtime and disruption. Team storage can also assist in defining team boundaries and can be easily reconfigured to support evolving team dynamics.

**Archival/Bulk.** For media that is accessed by numerous staff but on a less frequent basis, archival or bulk storage solutions can provide distinct space advantages (ref. 4a & 4b). Such storage solutions are typically located away
from workstations. Historically, archival storage was confined to the basement or offsite locations, but improvements in aesthetics and capacity have increased its appeal and applications.

Two advanced types of archival storage are rotary and high-density. Rotary storage is a space-efficient and cost-effective alternative to traditional drawer files, delivering up to 400 percent more information in the same floor space. High-density mobile systems can increase storage capacity up to five-fold and free up valuable floor space. Also known as compact storage, units are mounted on tracks to eliminate the need for fixed aisles.

In the end, a well-performed audit should result in the adoption of a truly integrated systems approach, whereby the overall filing and storage requirements are developed to meet the combined active, shared and archival needs for ultimate productivity.

The process should also lead users and facilities planners to a greater understanding of what the physical needs will be for all filing and storage elements throughout a workspace. It should further ensure the overall compatibility and flexibility of present storage solutions, as well as those that will surely arise in the future.

**IN HARMONY: BETTER AESTHETICS, BETTER FOR THE PLANET**

Storage elements are no longer mere additions to the workplace. Rather, they have become integral pieces of office furniture that often double as space divisions or worksurfaces. Smart planners find inventive ways to use shared and archival storage to create attractive and functional walls or storage islands.

Storage solutions should therefore have an aesthetic compatibility with all other items designed within a space. Sizes, heights and appearances should be carefully considered to ensure a good fit within the space and an overall visual harmony with other workplace elements.
Colors can add dynamic visual interest to a wall of storage or any environment. Accent colors can be used to complement systems and other office furnishings. Aesthetically appealing finishes such as pulls and fronts can complete the effect.

One color that’s on every industry leader’s mind these days is “green,” as in good for the environment. Green or sustainable design reduces operating costs, enhances building marketability, potentially increases occupant productivity and creates a sustainable community.

Green design has now become the single greatest force in the building industry. Ninety two percent of facilities managers surveyed say they are actively working to make their facilities more sustainable using specific and measurable goals. Storage equipment is no exception to the green movement and is even helping buildings earn points toward LEED® Certification. This desirable designation is the national standard developed by the U.S. Green Building Council to support and validate green building, design, construction and operations.

In fact, the right filing and storage systems can assist organizations in obtaining a LEED-NC (new construction) rating in five of the six qualifying categories.

**Category 1**: Sustainable Sites. Filing and storage solutions that dramatically increase onsite storage over conventional methods may help to reduce a building project’s size, thus reducing site disturbance and preserve open space. By greatly expanding the onsite storage capability, an existing facility could be renovated, thus allowing the shell to be retained.

**Category 3**: Energy & Atmosphere. Filing and storage solutions that increase capacity without increasing space needs can also help reduce energy consumption over the entire life of a building, since smaller buildings typically require less energy to heat and/or cool.

**Category 4**: Materials & Resources. Recycled content used in a manufacturer’s storage products could also contribute toward LEED points. Smarter filing and storage choices could also allow retention of a building’s shell and assist a project in achieving points in the building reuse category. Depending on the location of a project, the storage products used may also earn points for local/regional materials.
Category 5: Indoor Environmental Quality. Storage products that are finished with a powdercoat paint that emits no volatile organic compounds (VOCs) may contribute toward low-emitting materials. Space planning, densification of storage areas—especially to the interior of a project—and/or limiting storage system heights may also contribute toward daylight and views.

Category 6: Innovation & Design Process. If a project’s environmental goals cited in any of the above are significantly exceeded, additional points may be earned for innovation in design.

SUMMARY

Traditional systems are no longer adequate for 21st century business environments. Instead, new trends in filing and storage solutions that reflect versatility, flexibility and intelligent design features let organizations “do more” in less space, particularly critical given rising real-estate costs and a shrinking office footprint.

By addressing filing and storage needs early and concurrent with all other facets of workplace planning, organizations can ensure solutions will adequately support business objectives, positively impact employee satisfaction levels and significantly improve productivity.

Combined with a dynamic audit-driven approach that examines how work gets done, companies can develop filing and storage solutions that enhance efficiencies, reduce costs, eliminate unusable space, and ensure speedy accessibility to information. Storage elements can further support green design efforts, as well as facilitate today’s more flexible and collaborative workplace structures.

Armed with a clear understanding of the needs for active, shared and archival storage, the right solutions can be integrated into an effective and holistic workspace design, unleashing the potential for all-around success.
FILING & STORAGE AUDIT: TOP FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. **What do you want to file/store?**

   This seems like the most logical of all questions, but quite frankly, it is most often left out of the conversation. Answering this question sets a target for how filing components are designed.

2. **How do your employees prefer to file?**

   Are your employees more prone to piling than filing? Does your organization supply folders, binders or some other organizational tool? Do you utilize unique sized media in your daily activities?

3. **What’s your ratio of active storage versus archival storage?**

   Active storage is for files and media used every day. Archival storage items are accessed much less frequently. Keeping items in an active workspace that should be archived due to infrequency of use is a waste of good every day use space.

4. **Can storage be effectively used as division of space or common area meeting places?**

   Filing and storage, when effectively planned in an office environment, can be used to augment vertical panels and tables. Functional areas are defined, money is saved, and your storage area becomes fully integrated into the office environment.

5. **How can you reduce the number of file units needed in an office without actually losing storage space?**

   KI’s audit driven approach to filing and storage planning enables companies to do just that. Remember, it’s not about maximizing the number of drawers in a space, it’s about using every inch of space within the file itself to maximize filing efficiency.


