

# **MOVING LIBRARIES**

*White paper written by Joel Samberg for a major Northeast-based commercial relocation specialist*

## **I. Library Relocations: Moving into the Digital Age**

Some of the largest libraries, many of which are located at our top universities, have the equivalent of eight miles of books on their shelves. Moving all that material to a new facility is a task that must be reserved for professional relocation experts who know exactly how to do it. After all, in the world of academics alone, thousands of young scholars, faculty members, veteran researchers, media professionals and many others depend upon the breadth and accuracy for which the best libraries are known in order to complete their studies and do their jobs. An inefficient relocation can ultimately mean a useless library.

It is imperative that library directors who are planning to relocate their collections seek only the highest qualified service providers with the most advanced skills and tools to do the job. In turn, these service providers must be resilient, proactive and mindful of all foreseeable and unexpected circumstances that can have an effect on a library's relocation.

Some libraries move into entirely new buildings with state-of-the-art retrieval systems and extra rooms for research and study. Others move from one part of a building to a larger, brighter or more accessible part. Regardless of the reason, one constant challenge for relocation professionals is that there is nothing average about the library world coast to coast: they vary in size, content and even functionality.

Any library relocation can be multifaceted, with university collections often being among the most complex. The most experienced relocation companies know how to handle all contingencies and accomplish even the most intricate moves with speed and accuracy. Their representatives have extensive knowledge of modern library science and technology. That's

important because research and academia cannot slow down; the goal is to allow all library patrons to continue working, while at the same time getting the move accomplished in the timeframe established, and getting it right the first time.

### **A. Relocation efforts differ from library to library**

There are several reasons for that:

1. Library collections range widely in size. In a mid-sized city like Hartford, CT, for instance, there are more than 130,000 volumes. The University of Chicago adds 150,000 volumes to its million-plus collection each and every year. The Library of Congress currently has more than 32 million.
2. In addition to books, most library collections also include periodicals, microfilm, microfiche, electronic media (CDs, DVDs, videocassettes), governmental, scientific, historical and religious documents, dissertations, maps and dozens of other research, educational and entertainment materials. Different libraries may store and display these items in different ways.
3. Some relocations require that all materials be re-shelved or modified in configurations that differ from the way they were shelved or stored in the original location.

Every library relocation, therefore, is handled as a separate and distinct mission, particularly since libraries do present fairly unique challenges, such as the following:

1. Dozens, hundreds or sometimes thousands of volumes may be requested by library staff or library patrons even while books and other media are actually in the process of being moved from one location to another.
2. Items of great historical value may require special handling never required in conventional corporate or domestic relocations, such as the use of acid-neutral wrappers and cotton tape.
3. Books can develop problems such as mold and insect infestation, requiring special handling and treatment.

### **B. The need for library science qualifications**

There are many decisions that library directors make prior and sometimes even during a move, many of which can affect the relocation process. It is important, therefore, for the relocation specialists and the entire library team to be on the same page, as far as relocation planning is concerned. Variables include the following:

1. Will the furniture, computers, artwork and shelving units that are in the original location be relocated to the new location along with all the books?
2. Will non-book items such as electronic media and paper documents be moved to comparable locations in the new facility, or will they be slated for entirely new methods of display and storage?
3. Will books and shelves need to be cleaned of dust once the books are removed, and if so, by whom?
4. Are there some fragile volumes for which it has already been determined special handling is required? And if so, who will be responsible for their care?

## **II. Measuring & Mapping**

Every part of a library relocation is of immense importance—from the initial meeting to the final inspection. But measuring and mapping are certainly at the heart of it.

### **A. The difference between measuring and mapping**

Measuring is the gathering of information needed to chart a collection, and mapping is the creation of a blueprint to guide workers in their role of collecting all the library items, moving them, and finally re-shelving them in a new location.

### **B. First steps**

The library and the relocation team must develop a methodology for keeping track of all the library data and all the relocation work throughout the entire process:

1. The two primary book classifications used by most libraries are the Library of Congress call number system and the Dewey Decimal System; the relocation specialists must be prepared by understanding both.
2. Once the actual move begins, the relocation company should have a full accounting of where everything is located.
3. The entire collection must be divided into manageable segments for purpose of efficiently populating the carts that will ultimately be used to move all items to the new location and re-

shelved. Typically, library management and relocation specialists collaborate in determining how the segments should be divided.

### **C. The purpose of measuring and mapping**

Measuring and mapping provide linear dimensions of the entire library inventory that is to be moved, both by section and in total. Different relocation professionals use different methods; the most effective is a close cooperation between physical measuring and computer support.

Common methods include:

1. Tape measures that are used in combination with clicker/counter devices. This helps determine the lengths of shelf space being occupied by books and other library items.
2. Measurements are often converted into linear feet.
3. Measurements are sometimes logged into a computer by the project's IT manager.

Mapping involves deciding how many books to move at once, which sections to move first, and precisely where they will go in the new location. This, too, is a cooperative venture between library management and the relocation specialists.

## **III. Moving**

Once the measurements have been taken and the mapping has been completed, the move can begin.

### **A. Planning ahead**

Moving requires keeping track of the individual sections as they are taken off the shelves, carted, and re-shelved in the new location. It also requires planning ahead to make sure that re-shelving works out efficiently. Different companies have different methods for accomplishing this. Here is one that is among the most effective:

1. Call numbers on the first and last book in an individual section are recorded (digitally or otherwise).
2. These sections of books are put onto carts to be moved to the new location.
3. If measuring indicates that a section to be moved will have to be broken up in the new location (i.e., three-quarters of a single section will have to be put on one floor and one-quarter on another), the mapping configuration may change to allow the entire section to be re-shelved on the same floor.

Since the call number of every book can be associated with the call numbers of the first and last book in the section, the relocation company is able to retrieve any book that library personnel or library patrons require, even after the books have been taken off the shelves and carted.

## **B. Concentration on space**

One goal of nearly every library relocation is to have plenty of space left over for future growth of the collection. That should always be taken into consideration during the planning phase.

1. Sometimes libraries move because the original facility ran out of space, so personnel often plan for what's called a fill rate—that is, they determine to fill up a certain percentage of space in the new facility, such as 75 percent, or 85 percent, or whatever they decide is a good percentage in order to have enough space left over for items anticipated to become part of the collection in the months and years to come.
2. The library must then communicate their desired fill rate to the relocation specialists, who then must figure that into the mapping and moving.
3. Fill rates are determined on the linear feet of books divided by the linear feet of shelving in the new facility.

## **C. Equipment needs**

The amount of material needed for a library relocation depends on the number of items being moved, the condition of those items, the distance between locations and various other factors. Equipment may include carts, tape, foam, bubble wrap, various cushioning material to protect walls and floors during transport, and certain other tools and devices.

1. The number of carts used can range between a handful and several dozen. Some relocation firms prefer to use their own carts because they have inventory of various styles and sizes well suited for the various configurations of the materials to be moved. A standard cart has three shelves and holds approximately nine linear feet. It is slim enough to be pushed down most aisles and accommodates the height of most standard books.
2. Books put on carts typically stay in contiguous order, meaning that the call numbers follow one another.
3. Books on carts are typically transferred by truck in those cases where the new library location is in a separate building across campus, across town, in another county or an entirely new state. A 24-foot straight truck accommodates approximately 35 standard single-sided carts, meaning that the moving crew would fill 35 carts before loading the truck and driving it to the new location. This is less of an issue when a library is being relocated within the same building, which allows carts to be transferred manually at virtually any time, as long as all the mapping is complete.

## **IV. Additional Considerations**

It takes planning and teamwork to achieve a successful library relocation. Issues are inevitable (particularly since the work of the library never really ceases even when the relocation is in full operation), but the best in the business have turned the art into a science and have gotten the science down to an art.

### **A. The size of the relocation team**

The size of the team mostly depends on the size of the library. Personnel required can range from a handful to several dozen.

1. Measuring and mapping requires skilled personnel intimately familiar with the process.
2. Taking books off shelves, carting and shipping them, and then re-shelving them can be accomplished by locally hired-and-trained people, with the understanding that they will have to learn the basics of call numbers and the rules of proper handling.

## **B. The library is never completely closed**

Everyone involved in a library relocation must always be aware that, unless the library has established itself as being officially closed during the relocation, the books (and all other items) will be considered 'in circulation.' That's why careful mapping and computer support is important in order for library personnel and patrons to be able to retrieve any item at any time during the move.

## **C. Unexpected problems**

An intricate process such as a library relocation can expect a few problems from time to time, such as skipping an entire aisle while measuring, or removing a delicate item from the shelf or cart for special care and then returning it to an improper spot. To the extent possible, problems should be caught early. The larger the error, the more amount of time must be added to complete the entire job.

It must be noted, however, that technology and human interaction can work together in marvelously accurate and accountable ways.

## **V. Professional relocation experts**

The companies that are the most successful with major library relocations all have some things in common:

- They have the most experience.
- They are experts in library science.
- They effectively combine state-of-the-art digital and computer technology with manual work.
- They are single source contractors that can handle every aspect of the move, including (but not limited to):
  1. collaborating and brainstorming with library directors and faculty;
  2. measuring and mapping;
  3. training locally-hired workers in the process of book relocation;

4. skilled disassembly and assembly of shelving units;
5. understanding and working with call numbers;
6. careful loading and unloading of carts;
7. proper handling of delicate or compromised books;
8. proper handling of electronic or digital media.

With correct measuring and mapping, and the right number of people with the appropriate levels of skill, most library relocations are unconditionally successful. An unsuccessful one can result in an unusable library, and in the world of research, education and commerce, that's unacceptable. But it is also true that inefficient library relocations are rare. The successful ones are what define the professional relocation industry.