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**TAKING THE WHEEL:** Veronica Klopfenstein, seated, and Ginny Steinhauer of relocation management company Fox RPM helped Volkswagen Group of America park its new headquarters in Herndon.

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## Getting a move on

Volkswagen's move to Herndon took months and cost millions. Your next move probably won't cost that much. But start planning now.

**By Jennifer Nycz-Conner, Staff Reporter**

VERONICA KLOPFENSTEIN'S AND GINNY STEINHAUER'S arrival at Volkswagen Group of America Inc.'s new Herndon offices on a Friday morning in mid-August was a sign the finish line was near. Klopfenstein and Steinhauer work for Fox RPM Corp., a Boston-based relocation management company that oversaw the German carmaker's migration from Michigan to the

swanky new space within a Beetle's length of the runways at Dulles International Airport.

They were on-site for the move's final component, the "crate check," where the empty rental moving crates are checked and returned. Klopfenstein, the D.C.-based project manager for the move, systematically made her way from office to office, storage area to storage area, poking through empty plastic crates recently purged of files, office trappings and tchotchkes.

Getting Volkswagen Group of America on the

road and into its new home was an operation that cost \$150 million and moved 120 Michigan employees.

Your employee count may not rival Volkswagen's roster, but that doesn't mean you can't pick up a trick or two from its experience. Moving is an expensive proposition, ranging from \$190 to \$550 per person depending on the size and services required, according to Fox RPM. You want to do everything you can to get it right.

Here is what the smaller businesses of the world can learn from a big-time office move like VW's.

### COMMUNICATE

As they were moving in, the new arrivals in Northern Virginia received a three-ring binder containing everything they would need to know to get started.

That included a welcome letter from the chief executive officer, Stefan Jacoby, and pages of details that would help employees feel welcome in their new home, including times of chair adjustment seminars, Virginia state maps and coupons for nearby restaurants.

Communication with the contractors and the building staff top plenty of to-do lists for moves, but executives often forget to share information with employees directly affected by the move. No matter how smoothly a move goes, it is always an anxious time, and uncertainty feeds anxiety.

In many companies, both big and small, questions hang in the air. Who's getting which office? What does the new space look like? Who's moving when?

"It's a big secret," says Reed Stvan, president of Management Alternatives Inc. in D.C.

Address questions before they are asked, Stvan says. When moving clients, Management Alternatives sends company wide e-mail messages 60 and 30 days out with as many schedules and details as possible, such as when the computers are going down, when the boxes are arriving and the highlights of new facilities such as gyms.

That information not only helps employees know what to expect, Stvan says, but also "gives them a sense that the actual move and migration is under control and has been well thought out."

#### START EARLY

Lead times matter, no matter the size of the move.

Volkswagen's crate check is the culmination of a months-long process that began back in February. Six to eight months is a good time to start planning a move on the scale of Volkswagen's.

For smaller companies, the timeline is about the same, Steinhauer says. A small move with minimal furniture and relocation needs can be done in three to five months, but some clients like to start as early as a year.

Even small orders of furniture can require eight- to 12-week shipping times. Telephone and information technology companies have wait times to hook up your company, whether your job involves just a few people or a few hundred.

#### GO GREEN

Fox RPM uses plastic rental crates instead of traditional cardboard boxes, not only because they keep contents from getting crushed but also because they are a greener, more reusable alternative.

The finite rental period for the crates, usually a week, encourages employees to unpack quickly, reducing the still-packed-stacks-of-boxes-six-months-later syndrome, Steinhauer says.

Rental crates are more expensive than card-

## Smooth move

There is a long list of people whose schedules need to be in sync to ensure a smooth moving day. Office Movers Inc. in Elkridge, Md., suggests checking in with all the following:

- Contractors. Moving is a ballet of back-timing. Have you picked a date that will allow painters, installers, carpenters, carpet layers and anyone else doing work to get the job done — completely?

- Design firm. Make sure your office designer, if you're using one, knows the date and will have completed office layouts ready to go.

- Movers. Sure, this one probably goes

without saying, but it's always the obvious things that get us. Humor us, keep it on your list, and draw a big red line through it when you're done.

- Telephone and information technology companies. Down time is lost money. When your troops arrive, they need to be able to get to work. Make sure all the wires connecting them to the outside world are ready and working.

- Installers. All that modular furniture has to be taken down, moved and reassembled. Make sure you have the right professionals ready and waiting to get it done quickly.

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board boxes, but because more crates can fit on a truck and are easily rolled on dollies, clients often save up to 30 percent in labor and truck costs.

For the Volkswagen move, Fox RPM used Rentacrate LLC, a Waltham, Mass., company that rents interlocking, stackable plastic crates on dollies. Clients pack them and move them, then Rentacrate picks them up once the move is complete.

#### DESIGNATE A TEAM LEADER

Someone needs to be in charge.

Large companies often have a team of people to manage all parts of a move, including who gets what office, how the IT system will be implemented and when the new phone system will be in place. Or they hire businesses such as Fox RPM to manage all the logistics.

Small companies should designate someone to manage the project and get everyone moved smoothly and efficiently.

If that person is your human resources director, HR activities such as making new hires may have to wait or be outsourced. If the move coordinator is your office manager, get other people to help with routine duties like ordering supplies and supervising the mailroom.

#### TAKE A BREAK

On move-in day, Volkswagen offered hard-hat tours of the still-in-progress areas of the new facility to help people feel at home and take a break from unpacking.

That type of activity also fosters socialization among employees — something companies of any size can do.

During its recent move of 30 people from two offices into a new D.C. space, Fox Architects LLC (no relation to Fox RPM) turned moving day into a social affair, inviting employees to bring their spouses and kids during the week-

end setup, says Andy Yeh, managing partner of the office.

A little pizza and soda can go a long way toward fostering better office relationships.

#### THINK BIG, EVEN IF YOU'RE SMALL

Don't underestimate what needs to be done.

Smaller companies may have fewer people to corral, but they still have essentially the same lists of items to be moved.

Like big companies, small ones have phone systems, IT systems, office machines, wiring and furniture to take into account as they plan a move.

"Size is less relevant than scope," says Peter Stein, Fox RPM's director of marketing and client relations. "Even small companies may have complex moves based on specialized equipment, construction schedules or complex IT needs. Attention to detail and contingency plans are more important than ever in small companies."

Back in Herndon, construction cranes still dot the landscape, lifting glass into place while interior construction crews continue to work on non-office features such as the Escher-like staircase and a large multistory glass showroom where Jettas and Beetles and Audis will strut their stuff.

But inside, model cars topping credenzas and picture frames nesting on desks indicate that the Volkswagen Group of America folks have settled in nicely into their bright, open surroundings.

All things considered, the move went extremely well, says Jill Bratina, director of corporate communications, especially when you consider that the move was a multiphase operation that took place around ongoing construction.

Looking back, Fox RPM's Klopfenstein points to a sure sign of a smooth move: "People were working that morning."

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