Rekeying, lock replacement or master key planning for a growing office

Making sense of your office key options

When your office grows from a handful of desks to multiple departments, a separate storage area, and a few shared spaces, the way you manage keys needs to keep up. Suddenly you have more people who need access to different areas, and the old approach of handing out a single key to everyone no longer works. You are faced with three main paths: rekeying the existing locks, replacing the locks entirely, or setting up a master key system. Each has its own advantages and fits different stages of growth. Understanding the differences helps you choose the right direction before you spend time or money on a solution that might not last.

Rekeying is the simplest and most affordable way to regain control over who can enter a space. A locksmith changes the internal pins of a lock cylinder so that the old key no longer works, and a new key is created. This is useful when an employee leaves and you want to keep the same hardware but prevent that person from re-entering. It is also a good option when you move into a leased office and do not know who still has copies of the previous keys. Rekeying does not change the look or function of the lock, and it works on most standard pin-tumbler cylinders. The downside is that it only addresses one lock at a time, and if you have many different locks that use different keys, you will still have a handful of keys to manage.

Lock replacement becomes necessary when the hardware is worn out, damaged, or no longer meets your security needs. An older lock might have a loose strike plate, a sticky deadbolt, or a cylinder that is beginning to fail. Replacing it with a new commercial cylinder gives you a fresh start. Replacement also makes sense if you want to upgrade to a higher security grade or add features such as a restricted key system that prevents unauthorized duplication. The cost is higher than rekeying because you are buying new hardware, but the investment pays off when the lock offers better durability and key control. You might also replace a lock when the existing keyway is too common and you want something that is harder to copy.

Master key planning is the step up from simple rekeying or replacement. It involves designing a hierarchy of keys so that different people can open different sets of doors with one key. A master key system uses a single master key that opens all locks in the system, while individual keys open only their assigned locks. For a growing office, this means the cleaning crew can have a key that opens the common areas but not the IT server room, while the building manager carries one key that opens everything. The planning process is critical because the system must be mapped out in advance: which locks belong to which level, how many levels of access you need, and what happens when someone leaves or joins. A well-designed master

key system reduces the number of keys people need to carry and keeps access control simple as the office expands.



Each approach works best at a specific point in your office's growth. Rekeying is ideal when you have a small team and a handful of locks, and you need a quick fix after a staff change. Lock replacement suits you when the existing hardware is aging or you want to upgrade to a more secure or restricted key system. Master key planning becomes valuable when you have multiple doors, multiple people, and a need to grant different levels of access without issuing a separate key for every door. Many growing offices start with rekeying and later move to a master key system as the team and space grow.

There are practical considerations that affect your choice. The type of lock you have matters. Most residential-grade locks can be rekeyed, but some commercial cylinders are designed for specific keyways that cannot be changed easily. If your office uses an exit device with a built-in lock, the cylinder might be replaceable without changing the whole device. Door closers and strike plates also play a role: if the door frame is damaged or the strike plate is misaligned, even a new lock will not work well. A qualified locksmith can assess the condition of your doors and hardware before you decide.

Another factor is the number of keys you need to manage. A small office with five employees and one exterior door might do fine with a single lock and a few copies. But once you have a dozen people, three internal doors, and a storage closet, managing keys becomes a headache. A master key system eliminates the need to carry multiple keys and makes it easier to rekey individual locks when someone leaves, because you only rekey that one lock and issue a new key, while the master key remains unchanged. This saves time and money over the long run.

Restricted key systems add another layer of security. These use a patented keyway that cannot be duplicated at a regular hardware store. You need authorization from the lock owner to get a copy. This is useful when you want to prevent unauthorized key duplication by employees or tenants. A restricted key system can be part of a master key plan or stand alone on a single lock. It costs more upfront but gives you control over who holds keys to your office.



Tenant turnover is a common reason to rekey or replace locks. If you rent office space, the landlord may require you to change the locks when a tenant moves out. Rekeying is the standard solution here because it is fast and does not alter the building's hardware. But if the lock is old or the tenant turnover is frequent, replacing the cylinder with a more durable commercial model can save you from repeated rekeying costs.

Access control systems are another option you might consider as your office grows. These use electronic keypads, card readers, or biometric scanners instead of traditional keys. They offer easy rekeying by simply changing codes or deactivating cards, and they can provide audit trails of who entered and when. However, they require power, installation, and ongoing maintenance. For many small to medium offices, a mechanical master key system remains a reliable and cost-effective choice.

When you start planning, it helps to map out your current and future needs. List every door that needs a lock, who should have access to it, and whether you need a master key that opens

everything. Think about how the office might grow in the next few years. A master key system can be designed with room for expansion, so you can add new doors or change access levels without overhauling the entire system. A locksmith experienced in commercial systems can help you design a hierarchy that works for your space.

For businesses in Toronto, locksmithgt.com offers mobile locksmith services that cover lock changes, rekeying, and key work for offices. Their technicians can visit your location and assess your current hardware, recommend the right approach, and carry out the work on site. Having a professional handle the planning ensures that the master key system is set up correctly from the start, avoiding issues like keys not working in certain locks or the master key failing to open a door.



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Your choice between rekeying, lock replacement, and master key planning depends on your current situation and your growth trajectory. If you have a small office with a few locks and a stable team, rekeying when someone leaves is a simple fix. As you add more people and more doors, moving to a master key system saves time and reduces confusion. If your hardware is worn or you need higher security, replacing the locks with commercial cylinders and a restricted keyway gives you a solid foundation. The right path is the one that matches your office size, your security needs, and your budget, and it is worth getting expert advice before you commit to a plan.