Storage and Filing

Commercial Office Furniture | Nationwide Delivery | Lifetime Warranty

Effective storage and filing systems are the backbone of an organized workplace. Whether your office relies on paper records, shared supplies, or personal storage at each workstation, the right cabinets and filing units keep materials accessible, secure, and out of the way. This guide walks through every decision — from filing cabinet types and drawer capacity to security features, construction quality, and space planning — so you can build a storage strategy that scales with your organization.

1. Assessing Your Storage Needs

Before selecting any storage furniture, conduct a thorough inventory of what needs to be stored. Different departments and roles generate different storage demands, and a one-size-fits-all approach leads to wasted space or overflowing cabinets.

Storage Categories

- Active files: Documents accessed daily or weekly — contracts in progress, current projects, HR onboarding packets. These need immediate-access filing within arm's reach.

- Reference files: Documents accessed monthly or quarterly — completed project files, policy manuals, compliance records. These can be stored in shared filing areas.

- Archive files: Documents that must be retained but are rarely accessed — tax records, closed contracts, terminated employee files. Archive-grade storage can be off-site or in lower-cost areas.

- Supplies: Office supplies, printer paper, toner, cleaning products. Supply cabinets need adjustable shelving and a central, accessible location.

- Personal storage: Coats, bags, lunches, personal items. Wardrobe cabinets or personal lockers near workstations.

Conduct a simple audit: count the linear feet of files currently in use, estimate growth over the next 3–5 years, and categorize everything into the groups above. This data drives the number and type of storage units you need.

2. Filing Cabinet Types

Filing cabinets are the most common storage solution in commercial offices. They come in two fundamental configurations — vertical and lateral — each with distinct strengths.

Feature	Vertical File	Lateral File
Orientation	Drawers pull out from narrow end (front-to-back)	Drawers pull out from wide side (side-to-side)
Width	15" (letter) or 18" (legal)	30"–42"
Depth	22"–28" (including drawer extension)	18"–20"
Typical Heights	2-drawer (28"), 3-drawer (40"), 4-drawer (52")	2-drawer (28"), 3-drawer (40"), 4-drawer (52"), 5-drawer (67")
Capacity per Drawer	Moderate — single row of files	High — 350–400 letter-size folders per drawer
Floor Space	Narrow footprint, deep	Wide footprint, shallow
Best Use	Personal workstation filing, tight spaces	Shared filing areas, high-volume departments

Vertical files are compact and fit easily beside or under desks. They are ideal for personal filing at individual workstations. The narrow profile (15" for letter, 18" for legal) makes them a good choice when floor space is limited.

Lateral files are the standard for shared filing areas and high-volume departments. Their wider drawers hold significantly more files per drawer, and the lower profile of a 2-drawer lateral file (28" high) allows it to double as a credenza or printer stand.

3. Drawer Capacity and Sizing

Understanding drawer capacity is essential for accurate planning. Underestimate, and you run out of space within months; overestimate, and you waste budget and floor space on units you don't need.

Capacity Planning Reference

Cabinet Type	Drawer Size	Approx. Capacity	File Type
Lateral 30" wide	30" x 18"	250–300 letter folders	Letter or legal (side-to-side)
Lateral 36" wide	36" x 18"	300–350 letter folders	Letter or legal (side-to-side)
Lateral 42" wide	42" x 18"	350–400 letter folders	Letter or legal (side-to-side)
Vertical letter	15" x 26"	150–200 letter folders	Letter (front-to-back)
Vertical legal	18" x 26"	125–175 legal folders	Legal (front-to-back)

These figures assume standard hanging file folders with tabs. Capacity decreases by approximately 15–20% when files are packed tightly or when dividers and labels are used extensively.

Planning formula: Count your current linear inches of files. Divide by the drawer's usable width to determine the number of drawers needed. Add 25% for growth. A department with 120 linear inches of files needs approximately four drawers in a 36"-wide lateral file (36" usable x 0.80 packing efficiency = ~29" usable per drawer).

4. Storage Cabinets and Wardrobes

Not everything belongs in a filing cabinet. Many offices need general storage for supplies, equipment, personal items, and non-document materials. Storage cabinets come in several forms.

Cabinet Type	Typical Size	Best Use
Wardrobe / Coat Cabinet	36" W x 24" D x 72" H	Coats, bags, umbrellas, personal items near entry or workstations
Supply Cabinet	36" W x 18" D x 72" H	Office supplies, printer paper, toner, first-aid kits
Bookcase / Open Shelving	36" W x 12" D x 72" H	Binders, reference materials, shared resources, display items
Multimedia / AV Cabinet	36" W x 24" D x 48" H	Projectors, screens, video equipment, cables
Personal Locker Tower	12"–15" W x 18" D x 65" H	Individual storage in open-plan offices, hot-desking environments

Wardrobe cabinets are essential in climates with seasonal outerwear. A single 36"-wide wardrobe accommodates approximately 8–10 coats on a hanging rod with a shelf above for hats, bags, and scarves.

Supply cabinets with adjustable shelving offer the most versatility. Look for units with shelf capacity of at least 150 lbs per shelf to handle reams of paper and heavy supplies.

Bookcases are effective for shared reference areas and team libraries. Choose models with adjustable shelves on 1" increments to accommodate binders, books, and boxes of various heights.

5. Materials and Construction Quality

Storage furniture endures heavy daily use — drawers opened and closed thousands of times per year, shelves loaded to capacity, and doors swung repeatedly. Construction quality determines whether a unit lasts 3 years or 20.

Steel Gauge

Commercial filing cabinets are constructed from cold-rolled steel. The gauge (thickness) of the steel directly affects strength and durability. Lower gauge numbers indicate thicker, stronger steel.

Gauge	Thickness	Quality Level	Typical Use
18 gauge	0.050"	Premium commercial	High-security, high-cycle institutional environments
20 gauge	0.036"	Standard commercial	General office filing, shared departmental storage
22 gauge	0.030"	Light commercial	Personal workstation filing, low-volume use
24+ gauge	0.024" or less	Residential grade	Not suitable for commercial environments

Drawer Slides

Drawer slides (also called glides or suspensions) determine how smoothly and fully a drawer opens. There are two primary types:

- Full-extension slides: Drawer opens 100% of its depth, providing access to the entire contents. Essential for lateral files where folders at the back would otherwise be unreachable. Rated for 75–100 lbs.

- Three-quarter (3/4) extension slides: Drawer opens approximately 75% of its depth. The rear 25% is partially concealed. Adequate for personal files but frustrating for high-volume shared cabinets. Rated for 50–75 lbs.

For any shared filing environment, specify full-extension slides. The difference in usability is significant, and the cost premium is minimal.

Paint and Finish

Commercial-grade cabinets use baked enamel or powder-coat finishes applied over phosphatized steel. Powder coat is the preferred finish — it provides superior chip, scratch, and corrosion resistance compared to liquid paint. Look for a minimum finish thickness of 1.0 mil.

6. Security and Locking Mechanisms

Document security is a critical requirement in many industries. Filing cabinets and storage units offer several locking mechanisms, each with different levels of security and convenience.

Lock Type	Security Level	Convenience	Best For
Cam Lock (keyed)	Basic	Simple key operation; easy to rekey	General office storage, supply cabinets
Pin Tumbler Lock	Moderate–High	More pick-resistant; standard key	Personnel files, financial records, sensitive documents
Combination Lock	Moderate	No key to lose; code can be changed	Shared-access cabinets, environments with high key loss
Electronic / Keypad	High	Audit trail capable; programmable codes	HIPAA environments, legal, finance
Central Locking Bar	Moderate	One lock secures all drawers	Multi-drawer lateral files, after-hours security

Individual drawer locks allow different people to secure different drawers within the same cabinet. This is useful in shared offices where multiple departments store files in a single unit.

Master key systems allow a facility manager to access all cabinets with a single key while individual users have keys that open only their assigned units. This is the most common approach for organizations with more than 20 filing cabinets.

For environments subject to HIPAA, FERPA, or similar regulations, specify cabinets with pin tumbler locks at minimum. Electronic locks with audit trails are preferred for the highest security requirements.

7. Space Planning for Storage

Storage furniture occupies floor space and requires clearance for doors, drawers, and user access. Poor space planning leads to blocked aisles, inaccessible drawers, and safety hazards.

Clearance Requirements

Clearance Type	Minimum Distance	Notes
Drawer pull-out (lateral file)	36"–42" in front	Full drawer extension plus user standing space
Drawer pull-out (vertical file)	40"–48" in front	Deeper drawers require more clearance
Door swing (wardrobe/supply cabinet)	Door width + 12"	Full door swing plus user access
Aisle width between facing cabinets	72" minimum	Both sides open simultaneously; ADA passage
Wall clearance (behind unit)	0"–2"	Flush to wall unless ventilation needed

Floor Load Considerations

Fully loaded filing cabinets are extremely heavy. A 5-drawer lateral file loaded with paper can weigh over 600 lbs. When planning large filing installations (10+ cabinets in a concentrated area), consult with your building's structural engineer to verify that the floor can support the load.

Distribute heavy filing cabinets along structural walls and load-bearing lines whenever possible. Avoid concentrating large filing banks in the center of open floor spans, particularly on upper floors of older buildings.

8. Organizing Your Filing System

The best filing cabinet in the world is useless without a logical filing system. Your organizational method determines whether staff can find documents in seconds or waste hours searching.

Common Filing Methods

- Alphabetical: Files organized A–Z by client name, vendor name, or subject. Simple, intuitive, and effective for small to medium file volumes.

- Numerical: Files assigned sequential numbers. Requires an index but supports unlimited growth and is more secure (file contents not visible from label).

- Chronological: Files organized by date. Best for time-sensitive documents like invoices, correspondence, and project logs.

- Categorical: Files grouped by department, project, or subject matter. Works well for organizations with clearly defined functional areas.

Color Coding

Color-coded filing labels accelerate retrieval and make misfiled documents immediately obvious. Assign a color to each major category or alphabetical range. When a file is returned to the wrong section, the out-of-place color is visible at a glance.

Label Standards

Establish a labeling standard before files are created. Use a consistent font, abbreviation conventions, and placement (top tab vs. side tab). Side-tab labels are preferred for lateral files because they are visible when the drawer is open. Top-tab labels work better in vertical files.

Retention Scheduling

Not every file should be kept forever. Establish retention schedules that comply with your industry's regulatory requirements. Purge expired files annually to prevent cabinets from filling with unnecessary documents.

9. Common Mistakes to Avoid

• Buying residential-grade filing cabinets for commercial use — they use thinner steel (24+ gauge), lighter slides, and fail quickly under daily office workloads.

• Choosing 3/4-extension slides for shared filing — users cannot reach files at the back of the drawer, leading to frustration and disorganization.

• Ignoring anti-tip interlocks on lateral files — opening more than one drawer at a time can cause the cabinet to tip forward. Anti-tip mechanisms allow only one drawer to open at a time and are a critical safety feature.

• Underestimating future growth — plan for 25% more filing capacity than your current volume requires. Office paper volume grows faster than most organizations expect.

• Placing tall cabinets without anchoring — any cabinet over 48" tall should be anchored to the wall with anti-tip brackets, especially in seismic zones.

• Blocking drawer clearance with furniture — ensure 36"–42" of clear space in front of every filing cabinet for full drawer extension and user access.

• Forgetting about floor load limits — a row of fully loaded 5-drawer lateral files can exceed the floor's weight rating, particularly on upper floors.

• Mixing file sizes without planning — a lateral file drawer configured for legal-size folders will waste space if most of your files are letter-size. Choose the right width for your dominant file type.

10. Buyer's Checklist

[] Audit current storage: count linear feet of files and categorize (active, reference, archive)

[] Estimate 3–5 year growth and add 25% capacity buffer

[] Choose filing type: lateral (shared, high-volume) or vertical (personal, space-constrained)

[] Confirm file size: letter (8.5" x 11") vs. legal (8.5" x 14") — select matching drawer width

[] Specify full-extension drawer slides for all shared filing cabinets

[] Select steel gauge: 18–20 gauge for commercial environments, never 24+ gauge

[] Determine locking requirements: individual locks, central locking bar, or master key system

[] Identify non-filing storage needs: wardrobe, supply cabinet, bookcase, multimedia cabinet

[] Measure floor space and confirm drawer pull-out clearance (36"–42" minimum)

[] Verify floor load capacity for large filing installations (consult building engineer if needed)

[] Confirm anti-tip interlock on all lateral files (only one drawer opens at a time)

[] Establish filing organization method and labeling standards before purchase

[] Review warranty terms and confirm commercial-grade construction certification

11. Our Storage & Filing Collection

OfficeFurniture2go carries over 960 storage and filing products — file cabinets, bookcases, credenzas, desk hutches, storage cabinets, and lockers — from the industry's most trusted brands. Every product ships free with our Lifetime Warranty.

PBD Furniture — PL Series (Most Popular)

PBD Furniture's PL Series is our top-selling filing line — laminate construction, locking drawers, full-suspension slides, and 10 finish options to match any desk in our catalog (Espresso, Aspen, Cherry, Coastal Gray, Mahogany, Maple, Modern Walnut, Newport Gray, Silver Birch, White).

Model / SKU	Type	Size (W x D x H)	Drawers
101-JHA227 2-Drawer Lateral File	Lateral (laminate)	35.5in x 22in x 30in	2
101-JHA246 4-Drawer Lateral File	Lateral (laminate)	35.5in x 22in x 54.5in	4
101-KFA183 Double Lateral File Storage	Wide lateral (laminate)	72in x 22in x 30in	4 (double-wide)

Complete Storage Lineup by Brand

Brand	Products	Specialty
Safco	169	Specialty filing, open shelving, industrial solutions
Bush Office Furniture	157	Value-priced bookcases, hutches, storage cabinets
WFB Designs	119	Laminate coordinating storage (matches WFB desks)
PBD Furniture	99	PL Series laterals, pedestals, wardrobes, credenzas
FireKing	72	Fireproof file cabinets — UL-rated 1hr fire protection
Tennsco	42	Heavy-duty steel filing — 18-gauge commercial grade

FireKing Fireproof Cabinets: 72 fireproof models rated for 1-hour fire protection at 1,700°F. Critical for offices storing contracts, HR files, financial records, or any documents required by compliance regulations. Available in vertical and lateral configurations.

Our storage catalog includes 283 locking models, 85 mobile/caster-equipped units, and 196 Made in USA products. Available types: 294 file cabinets, 218 storage cabinets, 197 bookcases, 94 desk hutches, 50 credenzas, and 27 lockers.

With over 30 years of experience helping businesses organize their offices, OfficeFurniture2go.com is your complete source for commercial storage and filing — backed by free shipping and our Lifetime Warranty.

Ready to Find the Right Solution?

Contact OfficeFurniture2go.com for expert guidance, nationwide delivery, and our Lifetime Warranty. Our team brings 30+ years of experience to help you make the right choice for your workspace.

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