

Lateral File Cabinets – 10 Pro Tips

1 Specify 20-gauge steel minimum – residential-grade is 22-gauge or thinner

20-gauge steel is the dividing line between residential and commercial quality. It resists denting, maintains drawer alignment under load, and survives daily commercial use for decades. Never accept less for a commercial installation.

6 Account for drawer extension clearance in your space plan

A 36" lateral with an 18" deep drawer requires 18" of clearance in front of the cabinet when the drawer is open, plus room for a person to stand and work (another 18"). Plan for 36" minimum of clear floor space in front of any lateral file wall.

2 Core removable locks are required for any multi-user environment

When an employee leaves or a key is lost, a core removable lock cylinder is swapped out in minutes with a standard tool. Rekeying a standard lock requires a locksmith. Specify CR locks upfront – retrofitting later is much more expensive.

7 Match finish to desk line – order from the same manufacturer series

Finish names are not standardized across manufacturers. 'Espresso' from manufacturer A can look noticeably different from 'Espresso' from manufacturer B. Order cabinets and desks from the same line, or request physical samples before committing to an order.

3 Anti-tip interlock is not optional – ANSI/BIFMA certification required

A fully loaded lateral drawer extended forward can tip a cabinet. The interlock prevents multiple drawers from opening simultaneously. Verify ANSI/BIFMA tip stability certification before ordering – non-compliant cabinets pose a serious injury liability.

8 Wall-anchor all 4-drawer and 5-drawer laterals – even with interlock

Interlocks prevent normal operational tip risk but cannot prevent tip-overs from external forces (people leaning on open drawers, heavy items placed on top while drawer is extended). Wall anchoring hardware is typically included – always install it.

4 2-drawer laterals at desk height (28"–30") extend the work surface

Placed beside an L-desk return, a 2-drawer lateral creates a continuous countertop at the same height. This gives the user additional surface area with built-in filing below – more functional than a standalone file cabinet in a corner.

9 Mixed-drawer configurations add versatility without adding cost

Most commercial lateral lines allow you to specify each drawer as a file drawer, a storage shelf, or a combination drawer at no significant cost difference. A 4-drawer lateral with 3 file drawers + 1 storage shelf handles both filing and supply storage in one unit.

5 Full-extension ball-bearing drawers are essential – partial extension wastes the back third

Partial-extension drawers only allow access to the front 60–70% of the drawer depth. Full-extension drawers expose the entire drawer, making files at the back equally accessible. This distinction isn't always listed in specs – ask specifically.

10 Project pricing reduces cost significantly – always ask for volume pricing

Retail pricing on lateral file cabinets is for single-unit purchases. Orders of 3 or more units typically qualify for project pricing that reduces per-unit cost by 20–35%. Always request a quote for project pricing before accepting catalog pricing.