



Storage & Filing

Buyer's Guide

Discount Office Furniture | Expert Guidance | Free Shipping

Storage & Filing

The Foundation of an Organized Office

Walk into a well-run office and notice what you don't see: piles of paper on every surface, mystery boxes in the corner, documents stacked on chairs because nobody can find a home for them. That organized look isn't magic. It's good filing and storage strategy executed well.

Storage and filing solutions are the backbone of any functional workspace. From the file cabinet holding your most critical documents to the bookcase keeping reference materials within reach, every piece plays a role. The problem? Most buyers treat storage as an afterthought — grabbing whatever's cheap and hoping it works. That's how you end up with three mismatched cabinets, two broken drawer units, and a storage closet that looks like a yard sale.

This guide covers every type of office storage and filing solution so you can make smart choices upfront. At FindOfficeFurniture.com, we've outfitted thousands of offices across every industry. We know what works, what to avoid, and how to get the best value for your budget.

Storage & Filing

Types of Office Storage Solutions

The world of office storage is broad. Here's a plain-English breakdown of what's available and where each type fits:

File Cabinets (Lateral & Vertical) — The classic document storage solution. Lateral cabinets are wider than they are deep, with side-to-side drawer access — better for letter and legal files without adapters, and more efficient per square foot. Vertical cabinets are narrow and deep, with front-to-back file orientation. Both come in 2, 3, 4, and 5-drawer configurations. See the dedicated sections below for a full breakdown.

Supply Cabinets — Tall steel or laminate cabinets with adjustable shelves behind doors. The workhorse of office storage. Full-height (72") maximizes capacity; half-height (42") doubles as counter space. Standard 36" width fits through most doorways.

Bookcases & Open Shelving — For materials you access frequently and don't need to lock. Adjustable shelves, available in wood, laminate, and metal. Great for binders, reference books, samples, and supplies. No doors means zero friction for everyday access.

Credenzas — Low-profile storage units (usually 29"–30" tall) placed behind desks or along walls. Combines open shelving with closed cabinet storage. A credenza behind an executive desk provides document storage while keeping the desk surface clean.

Mobile Pedestals — Under-desk storage on casters. Typically 3 drawers: a box drawer for small supplies, a pencil tray, and a file drawer. Rolls under most standard-height desks and provides personal workspace storage for each employee.

Lockers & Personal Storage — Individual lockable storage for each staff member's belongings. Standard in healthcare, education, fitness, and anywhere employees share workspace or need secure personal storage.

Flat File Cabinets — Specialized wide, shallow-drawer storage for oversized documents: blueprints, maps, artwork, engineering drawings. Covered in our dedicated Flat File Cabinets guide.

Storage & Filing

Lateral vs. Vertical File Cabinets — Which Is Right?

This is the most common filing question we get. The answer depends on your space and filing volume:

Lateral File Cabinets are wider than they are deep (typically 30"–42" wide, 18"–20" deep). Drawers pull out to reveal a full-width interior where files hang side-to-side. Benefits: can hold both letter and legal files without adjusters, each drawer holds more files, and the wide profile means the cabinet doesn't stick out far from the wall. Ideal for offices with more wall space than depth. Top-quality laterals are also more aesthetically refined — a 4-drawer lateral can serve as both storage and a surface.

Vertical File Cabinets are narrow and deep (typically 15" wide, 25"–29" deep). Files hang front-to-back in the direction of the drawer pull. Benefits: smaller footprint in tight spaces, easily fits in narrow hallways and small offices, typically lower cost than comparable laterals. Ideal for individual workstations or small offices where floor footprint is the critical constraint.

Bottom line: For most shared filing areas, go lateral. For individual desks and tight spaces, go vertical. For dedicated file rooms, mix both to maximize space.

Storage & Filing

Letter vs. Legal File Sizing

File size affects which cabinet you need. Here's what you need to know:

Letter-size files (8.5" x 11") are standard in most businesses today. The majority of paper documentation in modern offices — reports, memos, invoices, correspondence — is letter size. A cabinet specified for letter files is the right choice for most offices.

Legal-size files (8.5" x 14") are wider and longer. Used in law firms, real estate, government, and any environment that generates legal documents, contracts, or regulatory filings. Legal files require deeper drawers — a legal-size lateral file cabinet is typically 20" deep vs. 18" for letter.

Tips for mixed environments: If your office uses both letter and legal, buy lateral file cabinets rated for legal size — letter files fit in legal-rated drawers with hangers, no adapter needed. Don't buy a letter-only cabinet if there's any chance you'll need legal capacity.

Check before you order: Manufacturer specs will explicitly state "letter" or "letter/legal" capacity. Always confirm before purchasing.

Storage & Filing

Steel vs. Laminate Construction

Material choice matters more for storage than almost any other furniture category. Here's the real-world comparison:

Steel Construction — Heavy-gauge cold-rolled steel is the toughest material in commercial office furniture. Steel cabinets will dent before they fail — and even then they still function. Powder-coat finishes resist scratches and clean easily. Steel is typically the most affordable commercial-grade option. It's the dominant choice for filing rooms, supply closets, back-of-house storage, warehouses, schools, and any environment where durability beats aesthetics. Available in a range of standard colors (putty, gray, black, charcoal, black).

Laminate Construction — Particleboard or MDF core with a laminate surface. Available in hundreds of wood-grain and solid-color finishes to match your office furniture collection. Better-looking than steel, easier to integrate into executive or reception spaces. Durable for standard office use but not as resilient as steel under heavy abuse. The premium-looking choice at a mid-range price.

Wood Veneer — Thin real-wood layer over a composite core. The premium choice for executive offices. Beautiful, warm, authoritative appearance. More expensive and requires more care (avoid excess moisture). Not appropriate for high-traffic or back-of-house use.

Our take: Default to steel for any functional storage area. Use laminate or wood veneer when the cabinet will be visible to clients or in an executive space. This gives you maximum durability where it matters and the right appearance where it counts.

Storage & Filing

Locking Options for Office Storage

Not everything in your office should be accessible to everyone. Here's how storage locking works:

Standard Key Lock — A cam lock or central lock that secures the drawer or doors. Keys are typically included; replacements are inexpensive. Most commercial file cabinets include at minimum a basic key lock. Good for general security.

Core-Removable / Interchangeable-Core Locks — Allows the lock cylinder to be swapped without replacing the entire lock. Used when you need to re-key a cabinet after staff turnover or when setting up a master-key system across multiple units.

Three-Point Locking — Secures the drawer at top, center, and bottom — not just one point. Found on higher-security commercial file cabinets. Significantly more resistant to forced entry. Recommended for sensitive financial, HR, or legal records.

Central Locking (Multi-Drawer) — A single lock controls all drawers in the cabinet simultaneously. Standard on most good-quality commercial file cabinets — one key turn locks everything.

Anti-Tilt Mechanism — Prevents more than one drawer from opening at a time, reducing tip-over risk. Required by OSHA standards in many commercial environments. Look for this feature on any floor-standing cabinet.

When do you need a lock? Any time you store personnel records, financial data, client information, controlled substances, or anything subject to privacy regulations. HIPAA, SOX, and similar regulations may require locked storage for certain document types.

Storage & Filing

Open vs. Closed Storage — Strategic Choices

One of the most overlooked storage decisions is open vs. closed. Both have a place in a well-planned office:

Open Storage (No Doors) — Bookshelves, open shelving units, wall-mounted shelving systems. Zero friction for access — just reach out and grab. Best for materials used multiple times daily: reference books, current project files, supplies in active use, shared equipment. The downside is visual — open shelving looks cluttered quickly if not maintained consistently.

Closed Storage (Doors or Drawers) — Cabinets with doors, file drawers, enclosed credenzas. Hides the contents, maintains a cleaner visual appearance, and adds an element of access control. Better for client-facing areas, items you don't access every hour, and anything that creates visual clutter.

The hybrid approach works best for most offices: open shelving for daily-use items, closed cabinets for longer-term storage and filing, locking drawers for sensitive materials. Layer your storage by frequency of access and security requirement.

Pro tip: If your team complains that "nobody can find anything," open shelving with consistent labeling solves the problem better than more closed cabinets. Visibility equals findability.

Storage & Filing

Storage Planning by Office Size

Storage needs scale with office size, but not always proportionally. Here's how to think about planning:

Small Offices (1–5 people): Each workstation needs a personal mobile pedestal (3-drawer under-desk unit). One lateral file cabinet (2-drawer) handles shared filing. One supply cabinet or bookcase covers common materials. Total: 3–5 pieces.

Medium Offices (6–25 people): Dedicated file area with 4–6 lateral file cabinets in a row. Supply cabinet per department or per floor. Shared bookcase areas near collaborative zones. Personal pedestals at each workstation. Consider a credenza behind each manager's desk.

Large Offices (25+ people): Dedicated file room with a mix of lateral and vertical cabinets. High-density mobile shelving (compacting systems) if document volume is extreme. Department-level supply storage. Reception and executive areas may need wood veneer or high-grade laminate pieces for aesthetics.

Planning rule of thumb: Most knowledge workers generate roughly 1 linear foot of filing per year. A standard 4-drawer lateral file cabinet holds approximately 6–8 linear feet of filing. Plan for today's need plus 2–3 years of growth.

Don't forget: The most expensive storage solution is one that's too small and needs replacing in 18 months. Buy slightly more than you think you need — filing always expands to fill available space.

Storage & Filing

Budget Tiers and What to Expect

Office storage and filing covers a wide price spectrum. Here's what each tier delivers:

Under \$100 — Entry-level file cabinets and light-duty supply storage. Lighter gauge steel, minimal options, basic locking. Suitable for home offices or very light commercial use. Not recommended for real commercial environments.

\$100–\$300 — This is the sweet spot for most commercial purchases. Quality steel or laminate construction, proper locking mechanisms, adjustable shelving, durable finish. FOF's strongest selection is in this range. These pieces go into real offices and last years.

\$300–\$600 — Premium commercial grade. Heavier-gauge steel, full-suspension drawer slides, ball-bearing mechanisms, three-point locking. High-capacity laterals, specialty configurations, better finish options.

\$600–\$1,200 — Executive-grade file and storage pieces. Solid wood veneer, sophisticated hardware, full integration with executive furniture collections. For boardrooms and senior executive offices.

\$1,200+ — Custom configurations, integrated office systems, high-density filing systems. For specialized needs or large-scale office builds.

At FOF, our lowest-price guarantee means you're getting commercial-grade quality without retail markups. And free shipping on qualifying orders eliminates the freight surprise that can add \$100–\$300 to competitor orders. Call us at 888-719-4960 to talk through your storage plan.

Storage & Filing

Quick-Buy Checklist for Storage & Filing

Run through this before placing your order:

- **Document type:** Letter-size or legal-size filing? Both?
- **Cabinet type:** Lateral file, vertical file, supply cabinet, bookcase, credenza, or mobile pedestal?
- **Material:** Steel (toughest), laminate (best value look), or wood veneer (premium)?
- **Locking:** Basic key lock, three-point, core-removable, or no lock?
- **Anti-tilt:** Does the cabinet have an anti-tilt mechanism? (Required in many commercial settings)
- **Drawer count:** 2, 3, 4, or 5 drawers? More drawers = more capacity but more height
- **Finish color:** Match your existing furniture collection?
- **Quantity:** Multiple units? Ask about volume pricing and keyed-alike options
- **Space:** Measure the space twice — height, width, and depth including drawer pull clearance
- **Budget:** Which tier meets your durability and aesthetic requirements?
- **Warranty:** FOF's free lifetime warranty covers every purchase
- **Shipping:** Free on qualifying orders — no freight surprises