



# Satellite offices set to be launched

The Victorian government is latching on to the future

LOUIS WHITE

‘People who don’t like working from home will be able to travel to a smaller office with a few colleagues who also live nearby’

RAJIV NAGRATH  
JONES LANG LASALLE

IT is not often that the federal or state governments undertake an initiative that could change the workplace, but that is exactly what is happening in Victoria.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet announced in July that new satellite offices would be established in Bendigo and Ballarat.

Companies have discussed the concept of satellite offices at length and some organisations are busy establishing such a set-up, but the Victorian government can lay claim to a pioneering role.

“The offices are set up so that members of the public can bring their issues directly to DPC regional staff,” a spokesperson says.

“The other important function of DPC regional is to assist in the co-ordination of government activities at the local level, to ensure agencies are working collaboratively and that policies and programs are complementary.”

Five DPC staff members are

working from the department’s stand-alone regional office in Ballarat, while another three are working with other government departments in the Bendigo office.

The initial phase continues until March 2012, whereafter a review will determine whether they have been successful and whether they can be expanded to other locations, such as Geelong, Bairnsdale and Seymour.

Ballarat and Bendigo were chosen because both cities already had government regional offices, enabling the efficient utilisation of existing infrastructure and community networks.

But the real question is whether allowing staff to work remotely will destroy the core fabric of the office by segmenting and displacing employees. Also, what kind of culture will emerge in the absence of a single central meeting place?

“It will become more difficult to maintain culture across the organisation, as culture is depen-

dent on leaders demonstrating on a day-to-day basis what the sets of office norms and standards are,” says Sergio Pires, director of design, project management and construction company Valmont.

“It’s all about staff viewing their reactions, their language, their inflections, their dress, their attitudes towards clients and employees alike.

“Leadership can be tailored to capitalise on the most important aspects of that culture, but it is not so easy to spread yourself across several offices, ensuring that staff are upholding company culture as well as fulfilling [their] day-to-day responsibilities.”

Valmont has grown to a national company of over 35, with a construction team consisting of contract administrators, project managers and site foreman, and a design team of designers and documenters.

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**Page: 1**

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Valmont believes satellite offices will work for some industries but not others. "Sales, consultant companies and call centres are a good example of organisations that don't need all staff to have their own desks, or be in the same location," Pires says.

"However, for more corporate and administrative organisations, keeping teams together and having them in a centralised location is the best way to foster staff relations, team work, open communication and accountability.

"It is so important to build a culture for a company through creating an environment in which people are interacting on a day-to-day basis — not just when they leave their satellite office to visit their headquarters."

Companies will also face technology issues. Being able to log into the server and download messages as well as interact with head office will be a key concern. Effective and speedy communication is hugely important, especially with the advent of social media. Companies need to respond quickly to urgent issues.

"Allowing everyone to connect to a shared hub, even when you are across different time zones and

thousands of kilometres apart, does help reinforce and maintain company standards and policies," Pires says.

"We've recently moved to cloud IT for all of our data and it is proving to be a successful move."

Of course, many people will benefit from satellite offices, as it will reduce lengthy commutes to work and therefore enable staff to not only be more productive in the office but also spend more quality time with their family.

"First, it has to benefit the company's objectives; and, second, improve the employee's situation for it to work," says Ruth Medd, chairwoman of Women on Boards.

"But anything that improves flexibility and productivity in the workplace is a good thing. Satellite offices should create a good social bond among the employees who meet there."

Satellite offices are set to become more common. New technology means that having all your staff in the one office is no longer essential for a company to perform to its maximum efficiency.

"The beauty of the satellite office is that people who don't like working from home will be able to travel to a smaller office with a few

colleagues who also live nearby," says Rajiv Nagrath, Jones Lang LaSalle regional director corporate solutions. "It makes sense to set up satellite offices. Once you enable people within the facility to have mobility in the office, they can then work from anywhere."

Jones Lang LaSalle is a financial and professional services firm specialising in real estate services.

Benefits such as less traffic on the roads will help the environment and reduce traffic congestion, especially during peak hours. The fewer cars clogging our roads, the better for everyone concerned.

"Companies really need to start clawing back their footprint," Nagrath says. "There is no reason why satellite offices won't become the norm in the future. If you live in Baulkham Hills, there is no point commuting to the Sydney CBD everyday. If you think about it, Qantas Clubs have been mini-satellite offices for years.

"Not many companies have formal strategies for satellite offices, but [that will change]. Even if you have one day a week where people are out of the city, that is 20 per cent reduction in transport and strain on the infrastructure."



Valmont director Sergio Pires believes satellite offices will suit some organisations more than others

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