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Guest Opinion

Use your electronic tools better to get rid of office paper clutter

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Instead of reducing paper, as we thought the electronic age would do, we have doubled our paper consumption. That increase in paper most often is caused by individuals feeling the need to print all their electronic information they receive. Increase printing causes more paper to manage in your office and on your desk.

We have an opportunity to become less paper intensive and save the hassle of managing the paper by becoming more electronic.

The barrier to most is just getting rid of the paper - the tangible aspect of paper seems to be of attachment to most individuals. All paper seems to become outdated so quickly these days. To become more electronic with your information, turn your thinking around so that paper documentation only is used temporarily. Then discard it after its use because you know you have it electronically.

Scanning files: Most large-scale office printers and multifunction desktop printers have a built-in scanner. Why not scan that client file, once you have completed a transaction and save it electronically? Documents can be saved in most scanning software in a "nonalterating" format called PDF by Adobe Software products, www.adobe.com, which is a standard electronic format and legally acceptable. You need to have the full version of Adobe Acrobat 6.0 to create PDFs, not just the reader version.

Saving Internet pages: If you save an Internet document as an HTML, your PC system will create a separate file folder with the same HTML file name with all the graphics and pictures files related to that Internet page. You usually can detect these graphic files with an underscore and the word files after the title of the HTML, e.g. Yahoo Article_Files.

These graphic files take up space on your system. More than that, you suddenly see sub-files created in your electronic structure that you did not create. Eliminating these HTML file folders then will delete automatically the original HTML file, as well. To eliminate this problem and confusion, here are a few options to use when saving Internet pages and articles:

1. Create a printer-friendly version: Many sites now offer a printer-friendly version that eliminates the graphics and pictures and only shows the text. Save this version instead of the HTML.

2. Copy/paste text into Word: Use the copy/paste function and insert the text into a Word document. Then save the document. With Office XP, you have the ability to choose text only

when copying Internet pages or text into documents. Once you paste the information into a Word document, Word XP pops up a user interface icon that will look like a little square with a clipboard in the square, usually located on the right side. Click this icon and choose "Keep Text Only." This will delete all the formatting that came automatically from the Web site.

3. Save page as PDF: If you have the full version of Adobe Acrobat, you have the ability to "print" an HTML as a PDF file. This keeps the page with all the graphics and pictures located in one document.

Saving e-mail: Printed e-mails are another huge paper producer on your desk. Set up an e-mail file folder system that replicates your electronic and/or paper file system and keep e-mails electronically. Or you can save your e-mails in your hard drive so that all your electronic data is in one system. I recommend you save e-mails in a Text Format (.txt) on your hard drive for easy access later. Attachments to e-mails must be saved separately from the e-mail to the hard drive.

Faxing: Although faxing is less common than it used to be, it is another way that paper is generated both outgoing and incoming. Consider purchasing electronic fax software such as Win Fax, www.symantec.com, which can send and receive faxes electronically.

If you have your own home office, make sure that you back up regularly - at least once a week. If you are in an office, create your own personal back up even though your IT department is backing up nightly. This way, you are assured your data is safe and protected in case anything might (and can!) happen to your computer system.

K.J. McCorry is founder and president of Officiency Inc., a professional organizing company based in Boulder since 1996. She is a productivity and efficiency consultant that specializes in customizing systems for individuals and companies with office and computer organization. Her first book, "Organize Your Work Day In No Time," was released in April 2005. She can be reached at www.officiency.com.

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