

20 TIPS FOR ORGANIZING A HOME OFFICE

Ready to tackle your own office? Professional organizers have plenty of suggestions to help you sort your stuff.

ONCE YOU DECIDE ON AN ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEM, BUY ITEMS YOU LIKE TO LOOK AT.

“Have products that work with how you want your office to feel, or you’re not going to use them,” organizer Rachel Strisik says. “If you hate manila folders because they remind you of your work office, spend the extra 50 cents on folders that match your decor. If you’re going to add a storage box, get one in your favorite color so you’ll gravitate toward it.”

2 DON'T TRY TO FIT EVERYTHING—COMPUTER, SCANNER, PRINTER—ONTO A DESK. “Suddenly the desktop is covered and you have nowhere to set things you’re working on,” organizer Scott Roewer says. Keep on the desk only items you need on hand. His clients tend to buy smaller desks for design reasons when they actually need a larger workspace to spread out papers.

3 SET UP YOUR OFFICE WHERE YOU'LL USE IT. Several of Roewer’s clients initially told him they wanted to put their office in the basement: “I’ve said, ‘It’s kind of dark—do you think you’re really going to go down there to work?’ And they’ve said, ‘Probably not.’ Instead we do a portable office at the dining-room table where the sun streams through the window.”

4 DIVIDE THE ROOM INTO ZONES. Roewer suggests compartmentalizing your office into areas—such as workspace, supplies, file/paperwork, mail, and reference—to establish where items belong.

5 USE THE BULL’S-EYE METHOD. Smart Productivity Solutions founder Pierrette Ashcroft advises setting up the room so that the equipment, supplies, and files you use daily are within arm’s reach: “A few pens, but not the supply you bought at the store. A few sheets of paper, not reams.”

6 START SMALL. A home-office reorganization can seem daunting if you don’t know where to begin. Strisik suggests starting by setting a timer for 15 minutes and tackling a tiny area—whether you

contemplate how best to use one corner of the room or how to sort a pile of books.

7 UTILIZE VERTICAL SPACE. “A lot of people forget that walls go up,” Strisik says. “Adding floating shelves or bookshelves is easy to do, and they’re inexpensive ways to increase storage.” You can also mount vertical files on the wall rather than allow them to take up desk space. If you have two or more two-drawer filing cabinets, Susan Kousek, a professional organizer in Reston, recommends placing small cubbies on top, such as the Ikea Expedit.

8 REPURPOSE WHAT YOU HAVE. For example, Strisik likes to put ice-cube trays in desk drawers to store items such as paper clips, thumbtacks, and safety pins.

9 CREATE A DEDICATED SPACE FOR SUPPLIES. If you don’t have drawer space, Kousek prescribes a six-drawer supply cart; it might fit under your desk.

10 STOP THE INFLOW OF PAPER. Roewer eases clients into a life with less paper by teaching them to file e-mails, tasks, and calendars online and enrolling them with DMA-Choice.org, OptOutPrescreen.com, and CatalogChoice.org to reduce junk mail. He suggests throwing away newspaper and magazine clippings related to hobbies and travel, instead storing the online versions by using a program such as Evernote (which is free) or Pinterest. Avoid printing out documents to ferry between your work and home by using Dropbox.com to share files.

11 DIGITIZE RECEIPTS. Organizer Pierrette Ashcroft recommends scanning receipts with a portable scanner such as NeatReceipts. It comes with a software program that can extract receipt information and subtotal it for tax purposes.

12 BE RUTHLESS. Roewer cautions clients against filing too many documents because they think they might need them in the future. “If it’s not going to save them money, make them money, or keep them out of jail, they likely don’t need it,” he says. “Only 20 percent of what we file we ever look at again.” He suggests

making use of a desktop scanner: "Scan it and throw it away instead of storing it in a drawer and never looking at it again." He also tells clients to toss ATM deposit slips, business cards, paycheck stubs from prior tax years, greeting cards that don't have meaningful notes, and user manuals that can be viewed online.

13 BUT IF YOU CAN'T BEAR TO PART WITH IT . . . If you're reluctant to throw away a document or clipping, Kousek suggests keeping one "someday maybe" folder. Every couple of months, trash the contents. If you haven't looked at it by then, you probably won't in the future.

14 INVEST IN GOOD-QUALITY FILING CABINETS. Kousek recommends "commercial grade" or "full suspension" cabinets, meaning the drawers open all the way. She likes the Hon brand and some Staples and Office Depot models. "Most people don't like to file—if it's difficult, it's not going to happen," she says. "Make it easy to put things away."

15 DON'T OVERSTUFF FILING CABINETS. Leave room in drawers so they're easy to shuffle through and there's space for more files when necessary, says Flavia Campos of Soothing Spaces.

16 LABEL DRAWERS AND FILING CABINETS. When Roewer edits file drawers, he says, "people are like, 'Oh, I forgot that was in there.'" He often sets up a file index directory, which can be as simple as listing files' contents on a piece of cardstock and taping it to a drawer. Another option is to keep a list of a drawer's contents in a folder inside the front of the drawer.

17 DEVISE A SYSTEM THAT CATERES TO YOU. If you need to file something related to your child's school, Strisik says, "how best will you recall it? Do you create a file for each child? A file that says 'medical'? Create a label that makes sense so you can find it." Roewer cautions against using pre-labeled file systems: "When I ask how people think of stuff, they might say, 'house stuff, banking stuff, stuff for kids.' So we set

up the system like that." Then he groups tabs by location, such as left tabs for house-related files, center tabs for financial files, and right tabs for children's files.

18 USE MULTIPURPOSE FURNITURE. Particularly for small home offices, Strisik prefers furniture that can serve several purposes, such as a storage ottoman that can be placed in a corner or in front of a desk for additional seating.

19 GROUP LIKE WITH LIKE. By storing similar items together—pens with pencils, labels with stationery—you'll be more apt to remember where to find them, Ashcroft says. Otherwise, she notes, "people have personal things mixed in with office supplies. I always find things like Tums mixed in with rubber bands."

20 MAKE ORGANIZING FUN—OR MORE FUN. When attacking an organization project, Campos says, invite a friend to help—and play music so the project doesn't seem so dreary.

CLUTTER CONTROL

There's no shortage of items to help you organize your home office. "US demand for home-organization products will rise 3.6 percent annually through 2015," according to a 2011 report by the Freedonia Group. By that time, the industry is expected to be worth \$8.6 billion. So how to choose? Here are some favorites of local experts.

BY ALEXANDRA ROBBINS

Large Desktop Station

\$24.99 at the Container Store

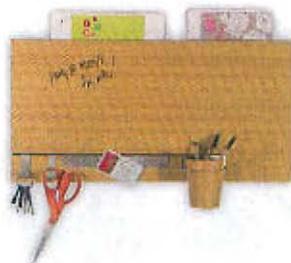
"These are perfect for storing file folders—action, to do, to read, to file—and other accessories on your desk," Rachel Strisik says.





**Linus Shallow
Drawer Organizers**
**\$2.99 to \$6.99 each at
the Container Store**

"I recommend little trays within drawers versus drawer inserts," says organizer Scott Roewer. "These have rubber feet. We put each supply—pens, rubber bands—in its own container."



**Bamboo Dry-Erase
Channel Panel**
\$49 at seejanetwork.com

"A great piece for organizing your thoughts and supplies," says Rachel Strisik of Rachel and Company, an organization firm in Bethesda. "It uses wall space while still being stylish."



**Pendaflex folders with
lift-tab technology**
**\$23.99 for a box
of 25 at Staples**

"I recommend these because the tab is built in and you don't have to deal with plastic inserts," Roewer says. "Just pull the tab up and you can write on that or print a label."



**Fujitsu ScanSnap S1500
desktop scanner**
\$495 at Amazon

This will scan 20 pages in a minute as searchable PDFs, "which makes them easier to look for than going through stacks of paper," says Smart Productivity Solutions' Pierrette Ashcroft.



Desktop File

\$30 at russellandhazel.com

“This acts like a file cabinet but has a bit of style, so it can be left out in the office,” Strisik says. “It can be placed on your desk or nearby on a bookcase.”



Knock Knock File Folders

\$9 at seejanetwork.com

“Sometimes you need a pick-me-up when dealing with paper,” Strisik says. “The more you’re attracted to the folder, the more likely you’ll use it.”



Bamboo Desktop File

**\$29.99 at the
Container Store**

“For a desk, I love this bamboo box,” says Scott Roewer. “The types made of fiberboard break. This, made of sustainable wood, adds a nice warmth.”

