

There is no escaping the dreaded silent ever-growing menace- CLUTTER!!! Lurking behind doors, exploding from drawers and multiplying on desks and shelves. It's the demon that plagues us – CLUTTER!!! There are some visible milestones where people seem to get motivated to do something about their clutter. Usually when they have to move offices, at the beginning of a new year, or when they get terminated. Since we seem to be at a time when some of these events are occurring, this is a good time to talk about clutter control.

Do you think that your cluttered area does not hold you back professionally? If you were an engineer and you had a design that had to be done right the first time and delivered on time, would you choose the designer whose office looked like the one on the left or the one on the right? When you leave a person's office you carry mental images that will form the impression of how you will view the person when they are not in front of you. Call an engineer and say you're going to be a few days late on delivery and they will immediately view their mental image of you. If you have created a positive mental image they will usually be more understanding and will work with you on delivery schedules, but if you have left them with a poor mental image they will think your late because of the unorganized way you handle your affairs. As a designer you should look like your organized enough to handle the job in a professional manner and deliver it on time.



Clutter is wasted space, time and energy. Clutter is really just stuff...your uncontrolled stuff. Stuff you don't want anymore, don't need anymore, and shouldn't have anymore. It's cluttering up your life, your mind, and seriously inhibiting your ability to be organized and costing you and your company a lot of money.....

Have you ever misplaced a telephone message or a spec sheet and had to search for it? Have you ever said, "It's here somewhere?" Have you ever spent more than 30 seconds looking for something? How many times have you looked for something and it took more than 10 minutes to find? The average designer loses 235 hours a year looking for stuff. How much money have you lost the company because you will not organize yourself? Do the math, I'll bet it's more than you think.

What is your time worth?

Salary	Value per hour	Value per minute
\$50,000	\$ 33.65	\$.56
\$100,000	\$ 67.31	\$1.12
\$150,000	\$100.96	\$1.68

De-cluttering your work area is more than just getting the top of your desk to look pretty, it is also getting your work area organized so you can find whatever it is you filed away or you need to do your job.

By becoming better organized you improve your business image and project the impression that you are a proficient, capable and professional designer. You may not make more money from it, but at least people won't think you're a complete waste of space.

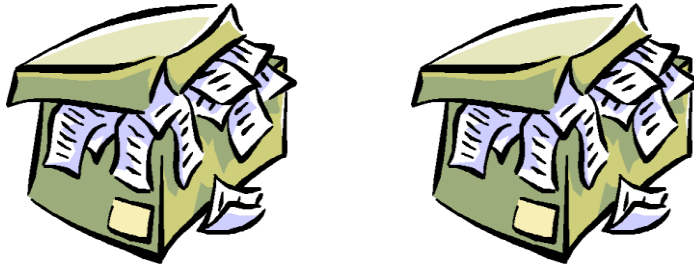
It's not important whether you are able to dedicate a large block of time for an office makeover or just 5 minutes to clean out a drawer, what matters is getting the job done. So what if it takes you 3 weeks? Releasing yourself from clutter gives you a sense of freedom both physically and mentally.

Breeding Clutter is not a viable Growth Industry



Phase One- Follow these basic tips to get started de-cluttering and organizing your work area:

1. To de-clutter properly, you must first empty out the entire drawer, desktop, box or whatever you want to get de-cluttered. You can do this during your lunch break or just stay a little late once or twice a week. It's painless once you finally start to do it.
2. Get some large trash bags and four portable containers and mentally label them 'keep-and-organize', 'save-a-ways', 'return-to-other-rooms' and 'take-home-to-clutter-up-my-house-with'.
3. Start sorting items into the containers. Keep asking yourself these questions as you handle each item:
 - Do I really want it? If you have to think about the answer- you don't, so chunk it.
 - Do I really need it? If you're not sure, put two dates on it- today's date and the date it can be trashed, and then put it in the 'save-a-ways' container. Review the 'save-a-ways' container at least once a year and discard all items past their discard dates.
 - When did I last use it? If you can't remember or it's been more than a month, move it out of your area.
 - What *was* I thinking when I kept this? Self-explanatory question. If you have to think why- you don't need it, so chunk it.
 - Sort items as you uncover them. Don't get sidetracked with unnecessary trips to other rooms or far off places. This not only wastes time, but when your enthusiasm starts to wane, you will still be left with a mess.
4. Your working desk space should be cleared and orderly at the end of each day. Do not leave jobs 'in work' or other files you're working on scattered all over your desktop. Take the last five or ten minutes of each day to clear and file **EVERYTHING** that accumulated on your desktop during the day. It takes about twenty-one days of repetition for something to become a habit. Start now and you will be Mr. Clean within a month. Clearing off the excess from desks and shelves daily makes your office look more organized and gives you the false feeling of being more in control of your life.



Phase Two- more detailed directions on how to sort out your life:

1. Armed with your trusty trash bags, start sorting and weeding through all the papers that seem to have been breeding on your desk. Trash anything that is expired or not vital to your existence. The rest should go into one of your containers. Don't worry about container content yet, we will be resorting containers later, right now we are just sorting "categories" of clutter 'keep-and-organize', 'save-a-ways', 'return-to-other-rooms' and 'take-home-to-clutter-up-my-house-with'.
2. Trash any magazines and catalogs that are older than 4-6 months. Get rid of all those catalogs that you have no interest in. If you are really sentimental about some of those magazines that you'll never read again then put them in the 'save-a-ways' container for filing. A better suggestion would be that if you find an article that you would like to read over again, rip it out, date and label if necessary, staple the pages together and place in your 'save-a-ways' container for later filing. It is a waste of space to save the whole magazine.
3. All business cards, notes, scraps of paper with phone numbers and addresses should go into the 'keep-and-organize' container, and then later be input into your computer, diary or organizer.
4. If you need to create more sorting container categories, do it. Some other possible containers would be like:
 - Office Equipment container for all those pens, staplers, paperclips, worthless "vendor freebee" clutter items, stained coffee cups, etc.
 - Software container for blank storage media, purchased software product packages, etc.
 - Magazine container
 - Reference Material container
 - Old Job Information and Backups container
 - To Do container
5. Do not shuffle papers from one pile to another. This is not really organizing, nor is it productive. Once a piece of paper is in your hands, make a decision on what to do with it and do it. **Go with your first impression on what to do with it.**
6. While we are on the subject of sorting - **Do you know where all your important personal documents are?** It is vital to know where papers such as birth and marriage certificates, passports, diplomas, certifications, property deeds, vehicle titles, etc are. Try to locate them all and keep them together in a fireproof box or safety deposit box. If you use a safety deposit box, make copies and keep them on hand in your home filing system.



Phase Three- even more help with your sorting task

1. Magazines/Catalogs - Look at each issue and ask yourself: Do I have time to read this? Is it out of date? Are there more than 6 months back issues here? Toss and be ruthless. Next check the index of your remaining magazines and clip any article you wish to read. Don't get sidetracked and start reading the articles now. For issues that you absolutely have to keep, particularly if they are to do with your hobbies or work, purchase some inexpensive magazine holders they go for about a \$1 for the cardboard ones. I like the plastic or wood ones best, they look more professional but do cost a little more. These can then be placed on shelves, under your desk, or on top of your filing cabinet. Buy a professional looking basket and put all the unread issues and catalogs in it. Any articles that you have already clipped for future reading should first be placed in a folder or envelope and then placed in your to read basket. Review the basket weekly and either toss any aging items or place them in 'your keep and save' or 'magazine' container. Remember be ruthless and toss anything no longer relevant.

2. Return To Other Rooms - Pick up the container and start to replace the items back in their correct places in the correct rooms. Don't stop until the box is empty, and don't get sidetracked and forget to return to your sorting task, and don't for Pete's sake come back with more clutter than you left with, your trying to free your life up not bring more clutter into it.

3. Now, all those business cards, notes, scraps of paper with phone numbers, etc. should be reviewed only when you are able to set aside enough time to go through all the items. Keep asking yourself - do I need to keep this number? Will I ever refer to this business card again? Will I really use their services? Toss whatever you don't need. By the way, if you want to be super organized, before you begin entering those new names and numbers, weed through your contact book and delete all those old expired names and addresses. Your contact book can be a day planner, Rolodex, digital diary or a program on your computer. If you use a Rolodex, just staple the business card onto a blank card and enter it. Once you are up-to-date, place a small box on your desk or in a drawer to put any new contacts in it. Try to update your book at least weekly.

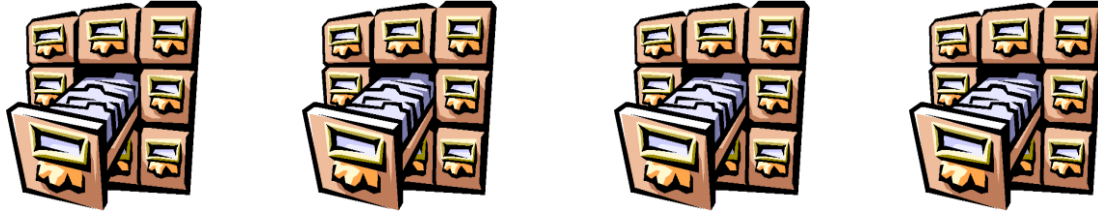
4. The 'keep-and-organize' container is probably quite full, but with a little time and focus you can deal with it fairly quickly. Usually it contains many "to do" items. With each piece of paper ask: Is it too late to do this? Do I have the time? Do I really need or want to do this? Any piece of paper that has the answer yes, either deal with it

immediately or place it in your desktop work process trays or hanging folder files (you do have some, don't you?) If not, get a desktop work process tray or create some hanging file folders for creating "to do" sorting tasks. Review these every day and know what you need do daily. If it is urgent, then do it now. Initially all paper should fall into two very basic categories, **archival** (old important data like spec sheets; old job databases, completed reports, backups; employee legal files, etc) or **current** (expenses, vendor information, current job files, customer contacts, job schedules and PO's, etc.). As you sort each piece of paper, ask yourself those by now familiar questions: Do I really need this? Is the information available elsewhere? Can I live without it? Once the box is empty, keep the piles separated and place them in your desktop work process trays or hanging files system.

5. The other stuff - Sort through and toss any leaky pens etc. Put the essential items in your desktop penholder or organizer. Next, organize all the remaining items into your desk or file cabinet drawers. Use those nifty little organizers that can be found in stationery stores to keep things neat and tidy. Remember, really think about what you getting ready to hoard:

- Do you need 12 ink pens where no two are alike?
- Why are you keeping markers that don't mark anymore?
- Do you need half empty stapler boxes when you use one strip of staples a year?
- Have you ever used that stapler puller you've been hoarding for twelve years?
- Why are you keeping four half-used tablets of different styled lined paper?
- Any clutter item you have not used in the last month goes out of your work area.
- Finally, last and most important, make sure that your wastebasket is large and easily accessible from your desk. It will help you do some impulse throwing.

Statistics show that 80% of all filed paper is never looked at again



Phase Four: Starting to look good now, so its time to set up a filing system

Many people feel that setting up a filing system is a complicated and time-consuming chore. There are whole books written about this subject and what seems like endless advice and different ways of doing it. Filing systems can be as simple or as complicated as you want to make it. I believe in keeping things simple. Rather than give you pages of step-by-step instructions, here are a few tips to get you thinking and perhaps started on a basic filing system.

Different Filing Systems

- The purpose of a filing system is to make it easy to locate important documents with the minimal amount of time and trouble.
- Systems can be either alphabetical or numerical. My preference for all my important miscellaneous paper clutter is the alphabetical system. It enables you to see immediately what is there and allows you to easily locate files. The important thing to remember with this system is to give files names that are logical and meaningful to you and create an index file guide so you find items later when you go blank on where you filed something...it happens sometimes...
- Numerical systems are good for tracking jobs but quite complicated to set up and maintain for everything else.
- Some people like to color code their files, but unless you have a large filing system there really isn't a need for this. Bear in mind that colored tabs can be harder to read than the regular white ones.

Naming Files

- Don't make a complicated naming system as this makes it very difficult to remember what a group of papers is called.
- When faced with a batch of papers, what is the first word that comes to mind to identify these papers? Yes, with some thought you may think of a better one, but often the first word should be the one you use, as it was what came to mind when first thinking of this group.
- Give each hanging file a general subject name and then use interior folders for different subgroups. Group like folders together under a common file grouping. For example: file subject groups like "new inputs" with interior folders for each pending customer job. ...You get the idea.
- Make an index of your filing system!

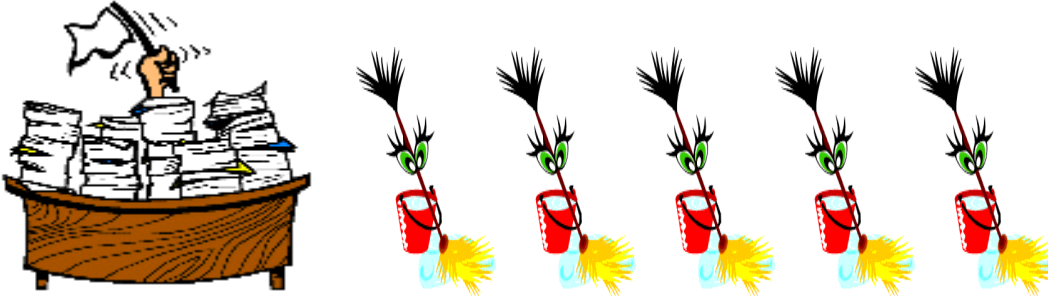


Phase Five: The look and feel of your work area

1. You're at work; create a work environment look that shows you understand you're at work and shows people you are a professional.
2. If you have more than three pieces of personal clutter stuck to your cube walls or arranged on your desktop you look unprofessional. Unless you are showing advanced diplomas or achievements of a high-order-of-merit, hold your displayed personal clutter to three items. 10 pictures of the kids and grandkids hanging all over your walls just says you're not really into doing your job, your main interest is elsewhere.
3. If you choose to display personal clutter in your office area, than please make sure you put them in a very nice frame or display. Thumbtacks, and bent paper clips holding your drooling cross-eyed dogs' picture do not say to visitors "I am a professional, please treat me with the respect I deserve".
4. Totally unacceptable clutter is defined as the "macaroni picture" your third grader gave you to hang in your office or things like plaques that say "I would rather be fishing" or "Scotty beam me up, there is no intelligent life down here". Do not trivialize the professional view you want people to have of you.
5. I think we all know not to ever display any pictures or paintings of anyone poised in an overly sexy or provocative way.
6. Calendars are viewed as a necessary desktop or wall clutter item. You can have some leeway here if you feel a statement about your individual personal expression is something that you just have to do. There are many calendar topics to choose from. If you want to get creative you can create your own custom photo calendar of your banned photo clutter items and display them that way.

7. Post-it notes are useful reminder tools. Do not have more than four post-it notes displayed at any one time. More than that and you will give the impression you are not ready for additional assignments. Review your post-it notes every morning to make sure you are not forgetting anything, and remove them once they have served their purpose.
8. Your computer screen also tells people a lot about your ability to handle job assignments and organizational abilities. Do you have so many shortcuts displayed that you no longer have a clue where they lead you? Do you have a screen saver or wallpaper display that makes you look less than professional? If so get rid of it. A standard blue screen shows more professionalism than having Dilbert running amok all over your clients design.
9. Keep your computer monitor screen, and all visible surfaces of your desk and chair CLEAN! Get your own bottle of Windex and paper towels if you have to, just keep your office looking clean. If you inherited a bad desk or chair then trade it in, or get some cleaner, wax, or paint and get them looking professional. If your office surroundings are less than desirable, take some initiative, get your supervisor's permission and improve the look of your surroundings on your own. People will notice your positive efforts to try to improve your workplace and they will respect you more for it.

Take No Clutter Prisoners And Be Ruthless...



Phase Six- your organized now, you've won the first battle, but now think about

1. Your car, it is important too. It does not matter what year it is or what model it is. It should be clean, especially on the inside. You never know when it will be your turn to drive everyone to lunch, or go pick up a client who had car trouble on the way to see you.
2. Sorting your mail daily. Open your mail over the trashcan you placed near your desk and keep only the important papers.
3. Start a reading file folder. Clip articles from newspapers and magazines and insert them into your reading file folder. Then take this folder with you when going to lunch or anywhere you will have a few minutes to read. The key here is to keep only the article you are interested in and trash the rest of the magazine or newspaper. This will eliminate piles of paper clutter. People never find the article they are looking for by going through years of past issues, they do find the articles that they cut out and filed properly.
4. Using office products that will help you organize your office more efficiently. Office supply catalogues can give one a good idea of the tools you could use to organize your office. Here are some useful office products to store information:
 - Rolodex (I have never used one, but some people swear by them)
 - Business card holder
 - Magazine holders
 - Notebook binders
 - Production boards
 - Bulletin boards
 - Computer disc holders
 - Day Timer System (Complete with 'carryall' binder)
 - Stacking basket trays
 - Desktop vertical file holder
 - Label maker
 - There are many products, which can provide a "home" for your papers and your work. Make a "shopping list" of items you need to get organized.
5. Utilizing technology to leave yourself reminder messages. Leave yourself a message on your phone answering system if there are something you must not forget when you arrive home. Leave yourself a message on your business phone

- to assist you in remembering an important item there. Send yourself a quick e-mail message. **Use a system that you will be sure to check daily.**
6. Being Sure to Have Recent Back-Ups of all your Important Computer Files--You Never Know When Your Computer Might Crash
 7. Activities and projects that can get lost or slip past critical deadlines without effective tracking systems. Here are some ways to be more efficient with your work planning:
 - Spiral Notebooks. If you have ever wanted to capture or quickly trace some information, a spiral notebook works great. It is also helpful during an evaluation of an activity (logging new job assignments, tracking job changes, vendor questions, ECN requests, etc. At work my spiral notebook and my Day Timer are never more than an arms' length away from me.
 - Production boards. This is useful in seeing, at a glance, what actions are done and what still needs to be done.
 - Checklists. Use a checklist to track actions done and actions, which still needs to be done.
 - Tickler (reminder) files. This can be an alphabetical or numerical file card system which stores information to be followed up on, or a computer program that will flag you at the right time
 - Voice-mail logbook. This shows what calls came in, what calls were returned, and any information about the call. Some people use a spiral notebook to log their incoming calls or duplicate message pads. The Important thing is to keep your calls logged in one place, not on bits of paper floating all over the building.
 8. Whenever you find yourself typing something repetitively, make a form letter and file it on your computer or give it a file folder so you can copy it as needed.
 9. Avoid buying too many storage containers. Look at everything as a potential storage source and not necessarily what it was created for. You will soon realize how creative you can be with the items already in your office. The most common organizing mistake is to buy too many storage containers prior to de-cluttering and reviewing what you actually have to organize. You then create a scenario where you have your storage containers becoming clutter items.
 10. Using some downtime to review your reference files. Are you really using this material? Can you retrieve what you want efficiently? Is your file index system up to date?
 11. Basically, there are only five things you can do with paper
 - It can be placed in a "Action" folder for further discussions with others or to get more information that needs to go with it
 - You can do something with it right then and there

- It can be routed or delegated to another more deserving soul
- It can be filed away to never be seen again
- It can be thrown away.

My paper-sorting process involves this approach. By dealing with each piece of paper, one by one, it is not so difficult to discover what is worth saving and what needs to be discarded. The accumulation of paper will occur when one doesn't know how to orchestrate it into their life or business. Therefore, the first approach in sorting is to make a decision on each piece of paper and either handle it right then and there or put it in its designated place to be handled. The goal is to give EVERY PIECE OF PAPER A HOME. The management of your paper flow means getting rid of any paper stacks and handling each piece so you know what you have to deal with and how to later find something easily and fast. Everything should have a "home," meaning there is a place for it. The piles may initially appear like it would take weeks, even months, to sort through, but they won't, or rather hopefully they won't.

12. There are various "action" type papers, which involve sorting in particular categories. There are:

- ACTION PENDING FOLDERS. Any item that requires action, which cannot be done during the sorting process because it involves more than a few minutes, is noted on a "To Do List" and placed in an Action File Folder or pending basket. (NOTE: It is best to keep these action folders in a vertical desktop file holder).
- PROJECT FOLDERS. This is an action-type folder, however it is for a specialized project that involves various steps. Anything that relates with a particular project goes into that file (i.e., researching a new computer, etc.). When it is done (i.e., you have purchased your computer), it can be filed away.
- REVIEW FOLDER. Any item that requires review or discussion with others. Such as "can you use this new package type without a major redesign", "will changing the board stack-up, or changing the impedance cause a drastic price increase", or any issues that need further discussion or research. Also, future events like trade conferences, training classes, services, or products you want to purchase, etc., all go in the review folder until you make a decision or get the approvals you need. It is important to remember to review your review folder daily. If it is an event you are strongly considering, it may be best to note it on your calendar in pencil right then and there! Whatever the case may be, the item needs to be noted on your "To Do" list (i.e., "Discuss the engineers' redesign of the power supply section with our compliance engineer").
- FINANCE FOLDER. Outstanding bills to pay, things to purchase, folders, expense receipts, etc.



The Final Phase: Changing a habit is difficult and creating a new one takes at least 21 days of practicing the new habit on a daily basis.

Think everyday:

- Do something to make your office look its best and stay organized
- A place for everything, and everything in its place.
- Items displayed in the office have to pass a test.
- Don't program yourself to create the habit of delaying your clean-up tasks or organizing your work area "Tomorrow."
- Label, file, or trash everything coming into your life immediately as it enters your area of control.

If you do start to fail then make another commitment to making the de-clutter changeover for another consecutive 21 days. You can do this, I did...

If you're trying, your not failing, you only fail if you quit.



References:

Clutterers Anonymous 12 Step Program

Custom Assignments Inc "Tips for Clients"

Iconoclast Steve Bass tells how to clear the junk from your system tray.
From the January 2001 issue of PC World magazine

Paper Management By Cyndi Seidler

Simplify Your Work Life By Cyndi Seidler

Office Organizing Systems By Cyndi Seidler

Conquering Clutter By Cyndi Seidler

And other references I wanted to mention but I misplaced them and I am unable to locate them right now. I know they are here somewhere!!!