

The Spring Cleaning Task You Likely Forgot



It's that time of the year where the sunlight has returned with vigor and vitality (here in New England at least) and you find yourself in spring cleaning mode. Those magazines that have been piling up – recycled. The junk mail you needed to attend to – filed. Your tax documents – complete.

As you survey your office, there's one place you probably forgot, and that's your desktop. No, not that desktop, the one where you have neatly color-coded pens and tablets lined up. The other desktop. The majority of our clutter today resides on our computers. All that clutter can [lead to stress](#) and a

spiraling sense of being out of control. Here are tips on how to perform a digital, springtime detox:

Email

We'll start with email because, well, it just keeps arriving doesn't it? In fact, [almost 270 billion emails are sent each day](#). And sometimes it feels like they are all coming to your account.

There are two types of people in this world: inbox zero folks and digital hoarders. Neither one is necessarily better than the other. It's all in what works for your personal style. Nevertheless, there's no harm in cutting down on email clutter. Here are three tips to help manage the madness.

1. Do a mass deletion.

Don't worry; we're not asking you to delete stuff you might later need. We're going to give you the gift of clearing out tons of clutter, one big swath at a time. The secret? Go to your inbox and/or your "deleted files," and pick someone who sends you emails every single day. It might be the local newspaper or retail store. It might even be Aunt Martha who loves a great cat joke.

Change your email view to sort by sender. Then, take that particular sender, highlight every email they've sent you and delete. Pick another one and do it again. Doesn't that feel good? Guaranteed you have wiped out thousands of emails with this one trick.

2. Deal with email as it arrives.

Staying on top of email is easier if you create a system. Most productivity experts recommend setting aside a couple of times a day that you can process email, rather than reacting the second it comes in, which will distract you from your current task. Take three actions with each email:

- Read and delete – ideal.
- Take action immediately – best for things that just take five minutes or less.
- Save for later – but not in your inbox, lest it become a “dysfunctional to-do list.” Rather, put the note in an appropriate file, then add it to your actual to-do list or save it to a reading folder for when you have some down time.

3. Keep email from coming.

One word: Unsubscribe. Yes, it seems simple to just delete the daily email from the photo-sharing site where you purchased holiday cards three years ago, but really... it's not. Resolve to click “unsubscribe” every single time an email comes in from a merchant or news provider that you don't need to see.

Too worried you might miss something important? Try Unrollme.com, a tool that allows you to keep your subscriptions available, but out of your inbox, as it catches them in a neat “Rollup” you can access when you have time. With this handy tool, you'll no longer have to dodge the latest BOGO missive when looking for your boss' update.

Computer Files

Your physical filing cabinet might be relatively well organized, but your digital files are probably overflowing. With the massive storage available in today's computers, it's easy enough to just leave everything where it is. But there's a better way to handle the voluminous computer files that likely keep proliferating.

1. Categorize the folders.

For projects that are complete, as in, you need to save the files but don't need to refer to them currently, create one big folder and send all appropriate documents there. Then if you do need something, it will be easy enough to sort.

For projects that are ongoing, nest folders within folders. For example, give the main folder the client name, then create separate files for reports, sales data, invoices, etc....whatever makes sense given the scope of your work. Then when you open a working folder, you won't have to scroll incessantly to find a certain document.

2. Name files strategically.

To make it easier to find the appropriate document, choose a naming structure that makes sense, whether it's client name, followed by weekly report, followed by date...or whatever works for you. If you are consistent going forward, you'll realize it's far easier to find what you need without having to open every file searching for something.

Then when a project is complete, it will be that much easier to send all related documents to another part of your computer so they aren't cluttering up the main screen.

3. Have a backup plan.

Make sure you have working back-up storage, whether it's a cloud-based system that automatically backs up each evening, or an external hard drive – or ideally, both.

Spending time spring cleaning your computer will pay untold dividends in productivity for the months to come. By having a desktop that is clean, well-organized and full of potential (rather than about to crash), you might even get to those essential tasks like [building or refining your budget](#) and organizing your finances for the year to come.