

Create an Office at Home

By James Turner

More and more people are working at home and more home offices are being built. Whether it's for someone operating a home business or just as a place where the complicated business of managing personal affairs and finances can be conducted in an organized manner. No matter what sort of space you live in, you can find the space for home office. It can be as simple as a cupboard or as elaborate as a room or two.

First, figure out exactly how much space you can dedicate to a home office. You might want to check with your accountant to find out how a home office is defined for tax purposes and other advantages investing in a home office might provide in terms of increasing the value of your home or allowing you a deduction. No matter how much space you have, try to provide physical or at least visual separation of your office space from the rest of the living area. Try to create privacy and isolation from noise and activity going on around you. This will also give you the sense that there's some difference between where you work and where you live.

Take a broad view when planning. – If you plan to install dedicated phone lines, computer connections, electrical outlets, etc. you might want to consider upgrading the capabilities of your home for a computer network, multi-room cable connections or other types of professional installation that may cost less to do all at once than piecemeal as you find that everyone in your house needs or want their own computer or television. If your home office is part of a construction project or new home design, things like a separate entrance, a dedicated bathroom and closet space are important extras that may add value to your home. Some homeowners create home offices as separate outbuildings – a basic 9 x 12 shed can provide a lot of work and storage space. Check local zoning and safety rules if you're planning anything elaborate – running an extension cord from the garage to a do-it-yourself metal outbuilding may not be the best way of solving your home office problem.

For the office itself, do your research and keep it simple – the less space you fill with equipment and supplies, the more space you have to work. Look into multiple-duty products like fax/printer/scanner/copiers with built in phones and answering machines, or space saving solutions like flat screen monitors or keyboard drawers. Remember to provide closed storage – particularly if your office is part of another room in the house. You’ll want to shut everything away quickly and easily – to keep it safe and private, and allow you to not be constantly faced with your work as you go about the rest of your life. The more research you do at local retailers, the more you’ll realize that various storage solutions can be efficient and won’t make your home look like, well, an office. If affordable, an architect, interior designer or space management professional can often help you make critical decisions, and can be worth the cost in terms of the overall efficiency of the space and your future satisfaction. Clutter and disorganization are your enemies – the more planning you put into your home office, the happier you’ll be.

As far as supplies go how and what you depends upon your storage space. If you have a storage shelf in your garage or basement, create your own “supply closet” to take advantage of lower prices office supply stores offer for bulk purchase. One of the pleasures of having a home office is being able to pick supplies that work best for you. You can develop your own color coding and labeling systems, decide how things are stored and displayed and in general have some control over all of the tool you use from paper clips to computers. If you have extra space in separate area, you may be able to set up some equipment such as a copier or postage station away from your primary workspace.

Don’t forget your creature comforts. No matter how Spartan your space or budget, don’t skimp on seating and lighting, both can radically affect your physical stamina and general mood. Office designers have thought of these things (though in many cases they’re poorly executed or budget driven) and you should too. Check for good lighting from a variety of sources. Your primary work chair should be ergonomically correct and adjustable. Things should be as comfortable as possible. It may seem like an indulgence, but investing extra can pay off in terms of how long you can actually be sitting at that

desk working without your back going into spasm and your legs being deprived of circulation.

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