

Organize Your Home Office

By Amanda Cook

It's easy to reorganize your home office without spending a lot of money. Before you invest in more file cabinets, a new desk or shelves, take a hard look at your existing space and equipment. Most likely you are simply not using the space you have to its greatest advantage.

The key to creating an efficient working space is to organize your area so those items you use constantly are within easy reach. Your phone, address book, computer, printer and current files should be closest to you. If your phone takes up too much space on your desk, consider buying a smaller model or set up a small phone stand next to your desk.

Most people's desks are cluttered with items that should be moved elsewhere. Go through the stacks of papers and folders on your desk and remove any items that you are not currently using. Create secondary bins for items that you use only occasionally and for those you expect to use more often in the future. All others can leave your desk for a separate area.

Before you buy any new office storage items, sort through what you already have. For example, instead of using file folders for frequently used papers, you might want to place them in a binder with appropriate index tabs. Once you've created the tabs, buy an inexpensive hole punch and put new papers in the binder. This way, when you are looking for a particular paper, you can flip to the section you need quickly and easily.

For papers that you need to keep but won't need as often, file folders can work fine. If you already have file cabinets, go through the drawers and transfer older items such as tax returns to a file box that can be stored in a closet. The idea is to make space for current items and leave room for new folders.

If you have accumulated stacks of magazines for reference, buy cardboard magazine holders and label them appropriately. They can be stored on a wall shelf or placed on top of a bookcase or file cabinet.

Generally, the best arrangement for desk space is a triangle or an L-shape. A swiveling office chair allows you to roll backward, to the side or completely around to retrieve items you need. Your choice of chair is one of the most important pieces of office equipment. Don't buy the least expensive chair you can find. Comfort and durability are important. A cushioned seat and back with lumbar support and adjustable height will serve you well.

Depending on the type of work you do, you may need an inexpensive, long, folding table for tasks such as mailing, packaging or reviewing maps and plans. Another option is a space-saving table that folds out from the wall.

Take advantage of any available wall space for shelves and storage bins. Choose lighting fixtures that will illuminate your work area without creating a glare. Shades, shutters or blinds help control light while adding a decorated look to the room.

Portable office equipment such as cordless phones and laptops can make your life easier especially if you are multi-tasking at home. Rolling file carts also make it possible to take your work into another room or even outside if you choose to take advantage of a nice day. A multifunction machine that works as a fax, printer, answering machine, copier and scanner is a terrific space saver for a small office.

Don't get so carried away with efficiency that you eliminate room for any personal items. Family photos, favorite paintings or hobby collections add warmth and can help reduce stress when you need time to unwind. Add flowers, plants, favorite knickknacks or souvenirs to further personalize your space. If the room allows it, set up your desk to take advantage of a window view. The breeze from the window can refresh your mind, and a lovely view can inspire creativity.

Once you get your files and papers organized, set up a system for reviewing paperwork once a day, once a week or whatever works for you. Filing papers and eliminating clutter regularly rather than once or twice a year will help keep your space efficient. Those extra minutes spent searching for papers, phone numbers or files are wasteful and unproductive uses of your time. Anything you can do to better organize your work area will pay off in future profits.