

# accessories

Accessories will help you control clutter by Janet Barclay

If you don't have a designated place for all your office tools and documents, clutter could dramatically affect your business success,

Accessories will help you get things under control – from trays and bulletin boards to files and penholders. But first, you have to change some of your work habits.

Even if you have established organizational systems, you will face problems with clutter unless you have a plan to find a place for every single article that you bring into your office. Otherwise, it's too easy to set things on top of your desk, filing cabinet, or another surface "for now."

All too often, "for now" ends up becoming "forever" or at least until things reach the point that you can no longer tolerate the clutter. If you're already at this point, the following tips may help you get back on track.

The first thing you must do is set aside time to deal with the clutter. Many small business owners feel they are too busy to do this, but in reality, the time you'll save once everything is organized will more than make up for it.

You might choose to block off a day just to concentrate on this project, if your schedule allows it. If not, set aside an hour a day or a couple of hours a week and keep at it until there's no clutter left in your office. Treat this appointment with yourself the same way you would treat an appointment with one of your clients – don't cancel it unless you have a dire emergency, and don't deviate from the task at hand by taking phone calls or getting distracted by other work.

The best place to begin decluttering your office is with your desk. There is no reason to keep anything in your work area than the things that you are currently working on. Your current projects should be kept where you can access them easily, but rather than keeping them in piles on your desk, they should be organized into

clearly labelled file folders.

It's likely that those piles of paper on your desk include information which is out-of-date and can be discarded, as well as documents that you need to keep, but are not currently using, which can be filed in your filing cabinet.

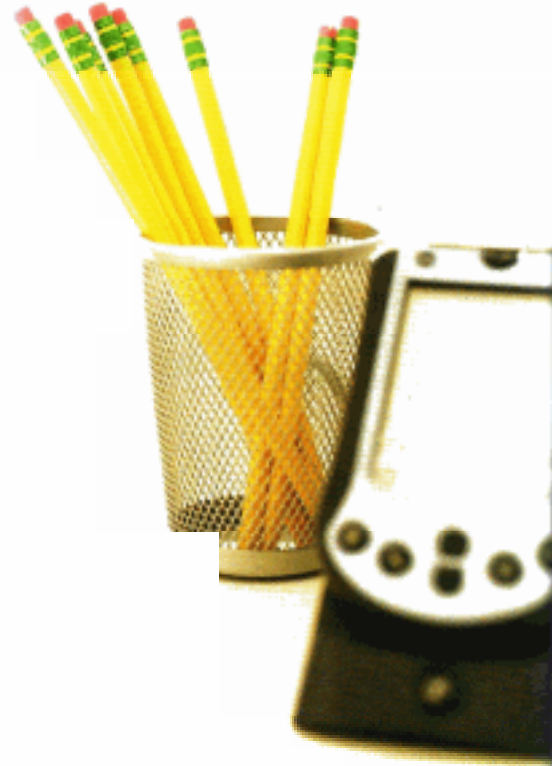
Once your work area is clutter-free, you need to go through your files and discard anything you no longer need, shredding all documents that contain confidential information.

Large organizations usually have a retention schedule that dictates how long certain types of information must be kept. If you're not sure, it may be wise to consult a lawyer or accountant to determine how long certain documents must be retained by law in your area.

Getting rid of the clutter is only half the battle. Maintenance is equally important, and here are three tips to help keep clutter from coming back.

**1** Make a practice of handling each document only once, if possible. When you open your mail or e-mail, deal with it immediately. If it's about an upcoming meeting or other event, copy the information into your planner, then get rid of it. If it's a quick question, answer it immediately, then discard it. If you may need the information again in the future and it's not readily available elsewhere, file it, don't just put it back in your In tray. There will be some items that cannot be dealt with immediately. These should be noted on your "to do" list and the document placed in the appropriate folder on your desk.

**2** Implement a clean desk policy where desks must be cleared of all paperwork at the end of each day. Use pen and pencil holders, desk



trays, magazine holders, paper dips holders or any other storage devices for your office tools to keep accessories organized.

**3** Set a filing schedule to prevent a backlog of unfiled documents. You often need to refer to something you've worked on recently, and you don't want to have to sift through piles of paperwork to find it. How often you need to do filing will depend on the volume of paper you keep, but the important thing is to keep it up to date.

A tidy office is only one of the benefits of getting rid of clutter. When your work environment is clutter-free, you'll be more productive, because there will be fewer things to distract you from the task at hand. ●

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