

This is an excerpt of an article quoting Keeping Order's Lee Ann Kleinfelter. It appeared in the *Contra Costa Times* on March 29, 2008, written by *Times* staff writer Ann Tatko-Peterson.

## The ABCs to Organizing Your Space

**A**sk any organizer why most people want to organize and the answer is basically the same: Paper.

"Paper is infinitely more complex to organize than anything else," says Ariane Benefit, author of *Neat and Simple Guide to Organizing Your Home Office*, "because it's constantly coming in."

With that in mind, filing is a major component of home office reorganization. Here are some tips and tricks for filing:

- **Make space:** If you have an old file cabinet, says professional organizer Deborah Dobin Robinson, get the old stuff out of it. "A lot of times file cabinets are jammed pack with stuff you don't use anymore," she explains. "Then you end up buying another cabinet, or putting the papers in boxes or piling them on the floor. It's human nature."
- **Create a systematic approach:** Some books discourage using plastic tabs, the professional organizer Leeann Kleinfelter notes that once the folders are set up the work is essentially done. "What's important is that the files are easy to maintain; otherwise it's not going to work."

Professional organizer Ariane Benefit recommends not staggering the tabs when ordering them alphabetically, however, in case you need to add a folder later.

Professional organizer Katherine Korlacki also likes subdividing files, placing business folders in one drawer and home in another. This also works when two or more people are sharing a home office, but have different filing system preferences.

- **Use colors in blocks:** Designate one color for each set of files, such as green for clients and yellow for administration suggests Monica Ricci, professional organizer for Office Depot. "Don't intermix. The eye becomes confused when it sees a mishmash of colors. It's easier to immediately find that section and a folder within it when they're grouped by color."
- **Use general labels:** Being too specific can result in multiple folders for the same category. "I've saw files for automobile, Honda and Toyota with papers in all of them," Robinson says. "Then you can't remember what the file is called, so you make a new one. I've seen lots of files with just one paper in it."
- **Keep a desktop file system:** These are perfect for action files, such as bills and other papers that require regular attention. To make the files easy to use, professional organizer Katherine Korlacki suggests labeling them based on the action required (Bills to Pay, Letters to Send, etc.).



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- **Regularly update tax files:** Ricci recommends keeping tax files together, such as in a portable file box. Create a separate folder for each deduction. Then each month, use a printing calculator to tally that month's totals. "You'll have a paper receipt for each month," she says, "so at the end of the year, you only have to add up the 12 totals. It's a huge timesaver."

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### Paper Toss

The best way to de-clutter your home office—and keep it organized—is to reduce your paper load. Here are some tips from area organizers.

#### *From Leeann Kleinfelter*

- Recycle Works, a San Mateo County program, has online links to help reduce residential and work junk mail, including contacts for getting your name off mailing lists. Visit [www.recycleworks.com/junk mail/index.html](http://www.recycleworks.com/junkmail/index.html).
- For a \$20 fee [www.greendimes.com](http://www.greendimes.com) promises to reduce your junk mail by 90%.
- To reduce preapproved credit card and insurance offers sign up at [www.optoutprescreen.com](http://www.optoutprescreen.com). This opt out is good for five years.

#### *From Katherine Korlacki*

All documents containing confidential information—including bank accounts, credit card and Social Security numbers—should be destroyed using a cross cut shredder. For those with a lot of paper or limited time, Korlacki suggests putting the documents in a box near your desk and using a shredding service. Here are a few in the Bay Area:

- Shred Center, 1998 Mayhew Way, Walnut Creek 925-465-9553
- Automatic Response Systems, 1461 Eastshore Highway, Berkeley 510-525-8202
- Shred First, 45133 Industrial Way, Fremont 510-433-0200
- Shred It, 5150 Commercial Circle, Suite A, Concord 925 363-7301

#### *From Deborah Dobin Robinson*

Here are some suggested guidelines for how long to keep certain papers.

- Documents pertaining to investments in real estate transactions should be maintained for the duration of ownership, if no computer records exist. Often the purchase price is required during sales transactions.
- Bills such as utilities should be kept for one year, if you deduct a home-based business on your taxes.
- Tax return should be kept for three years, or seven years if declaring deductions, from the date of filing.