



ORGANIZATION AND THE CLUTTER CORRELATION

This was Albert Einstein's desk. *LIFE* photographer Ralph Morse took this photo 60 years ago, the very day Einstein died. When I first saw this image, I instantly felt relieved at the atrocious state of my own desk, feeling that perhaps the secret to Einstein's genius lay in his disorganization. I couldn't help but think, maybe my workspace hinted at some level of my own genius? Or was this just an excuse not to organize my environment? When is the clutter no longer a manifestation of creativity? When do you know that it is simply just "a mess"? After an especially busy month, I entered my office one morning looking for a certain phone number I knew I had written down somewhere... Thirty minutes later, my round filing cabinet some call a trashcan was full, and I still hadn't found the number.

That's when you know.

Clutter no longer correlates with creativity when your productivity suffers. And since I'm into technology, I decided to take a closer look at how I could use it to revamp my failing organizational system. I discovered there were way too many choices. Of course, I felt the need to organize these, so here are a few software tools I discovered that might be appropriate for you, too. I filtered through a myriad of options to present only a select few that had free plans available and were easy to implement yet contained enough features to cover most small cities' or water systems' needs.

Low-tech

The most familiar and accessible online tool for organization has to be Google Drive or Google Apps. A simple shared Google spreadsheet coupled with a shared Google calendar can be a powerful and easy solution for individuals or teams. You can always add more tools or third party apps after discovering what other needs you might encounter. Integrate these with your phone or email using notifications and you no longer have an excuse for missing something.

For the Individual

TheBrain.com is what its name claims: a picture of your brain. The entry level free plan is full of features and perfect for more visual and random thinkers. You could integrate all your information in one place, use Mind mapping for visual organizing of ideas, share your ideas in presentation mode, add tasks, manage files and documents and more. Because it's cloud based, you can access it anywhere including your mobile device. If you wanted to upgrade and add more features, pricing is based on licensing so there are no subscription fees. Or you can purchase service only and pay per month.

Credit: Ralph Morse / Contributor

Littered desk in study belonging to Albert Einstein.

(Photo by Ralph Morse/The LIFE Picture Collection/Gèy Images)

Evernote.com is a very popular online tool that allows users to set goals, search recorded ideas, and present to others in a meaningful way. It is compatible with all devices, and while you can opt for the free plan, an upgradeable version with more features is available.

Azendoo.com is the management tool of choice for teams at Evernote (ironically), Cisco, Toyota, Nike, and MIT. Its simple interface is easier to use than most other solutions, mostly because it integrates with other popular services for file storage. It has more team features as well, and is mobile friendly. The personal free plan is upgradeable to more premium services you pay for monthly.

Toodledo.com offers a free personal version that has features most would find adequate. You can use tasks, notes, lists, outlines, habits, scheduling, team collaboration, file sharing, time tracking. It is also mobile friendly.

Trello.com also offers its free version with premium subscriptions available, yet the basic free features cover needs for most people. Much like Azendoo, Trello is simple on the surface, but integrates with other popular storage suppliers. You can add checklists, labels, due dates, and more. The best feature perhaps is the notification system so you can get reminders.

Bring the Team Together

Basecamp.com is considered to be The One that started online team project management. While it's only free for the initial 60 day trial, it's worth mentioning as big names like Keen Footwear and hundreds of thousands of other businesses or groups enjoy the company's permanence. For \$25 per month to start you can get 3G storage, to do lists,

people management, email integration and more. There are iPhone and Android apps as well.

Wrike.com is a project management solution free for up to five users, with 2045 MB of file storage and unlimited number of collaborators. It can integrate with Google Drive, Dropbox, Box, and iCal calendar, as well as your email, or on any phone. It features spreadsheet views and realtime activity sharing. If you wanted to spring for the pro version, you can even utilize the professional project management tool Gantt Chart.

Checkvist.com offers a free version that features unlimited hierarchical lists, unlimited sharing and collaboration, note taking, due dates, and a robust search. Two unique features not seen often are adding tasks via email, and importing/exporting data. There is a mobile version and it integrates with email.

Gantter.com is one of my favorites, mostly because it is a completely free open source project that resembles an online version of Microsoft Project. While not as intuitive for simple tasks, if you have some training in project management, this is definitely worth trying out. It would work best for more complex projects in organizing multiple people and deadlines where tasks have to start and be completed in the right order, such as construction projects. It integrates with Google drive or Google apps, has a downloadable desktop version, and can coordinate with smartapp.com for more mobile features.

Wiggio.com is another of my favorites only for a more day-to-day application. As it suggests, Wiggio is ideal for small businesses, groups, organizations, clubs, etc. If you are not a fan of Google, but don't want to miss out on

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completely free and powerful features, try this solution where you can host virtual meetings and conference calls, create to-do lists and assign tasks, send email, text, and voice messages, manage events with a shared calendar, poll your group in real time, and upload and manage files in a shared folder. Best feature for the social crowd? You can sign up with your Facebook login.

What about a Custom Solution?

A couple of years ago, General Manager Elmer Ronnebaum saw an inefficiency in organization of the KRWA team and asked me to write a custom solution to help employees make better use of their time. What resulted was our Time-Log system, which combines a normal time sheet with logging for projects as well as other features. Individuals or groups can receive targeted messages and exception or summary reports on their dashboard. Paper reporting was replaced by less cumbersome online forms. The interface checks or limits entries as they are made to reduce the amount of unintentional errors. Reports were customized to provide the exact look into trends and totals. And there is a library for uploading and storing files and documents. The system is secured by user login and tiered by levels of permission that depend on employee role. Perhaps if the systems in Kansas could benefit from a solution tailor-made for their needs, I could create a KRWA online product featuring work order systems, timesheets, projects, asset tracking, and file management. The high costs of a customized

solution would be divided among those purchasing it. If none of the out-of-the-box management solutions fit your needs, contact KRWA with your interest in a custom piece of work.

E=mc² or Efficiency equals mess times clutter squared

I finally found that number scribbled on the back of a receipt, so I took a picture of it with my phone.

While this software review is by no means a comprehensive list or an endorsement for any particular solution, perhaps these ideas could get you started on your way to using technology for greater productivity. The key is to decide on a way to get organized and stay organized, then go for it. If there are tasks in your life you do not like to do, but have to do, then automate them with technology. That leaves you more time to focus on the stuff you like doing. Remember to balance the task of organizing itself, so that your workload ends up being lighter, leaving most of your time free to pursue the tasks that really matter. And best of all, knowing that a clean desk doesn't necessarily correlate with greater productivity, enjoy that clutter guilt-free!

Since 1997, Jen Sharp (JenSharp.com) has served business and government across Kansas and the US and even internationally, specializing in Web development, design & programming including e-Learning, ecommerce, content management systems, and other small business solutions.



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