



The Organized Computer
Clutter Control For Every Type
Of Computer User



minibook

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Introduction: You Are What You Type

“How can you ever find anything with all that clutter on your computer’s desktop?” Nancy asked Bill, a graphic artist who prefers to keep things out where he can see them. “I can find things just fine,” Bill replied, “But let me ask you something, how do you know where your stuff is when you use two computers, a handheld PDA, and all those flash drives I see you toting around?” He asked his co-worker. “Touche. I admit, I look like a scatterbrain, but I do know where everything is, sort of. I’m too busy making money to slow down and organize it all,” Nancy, the sales rep admitted. Overhearing this conversation, Tom, the project manager jumped in, “I don’t know about you two, but I think the best way to organize your computer is to put everything away the minute you’re done with it.” The other two rolled their eyes and went back to their (very different) computer screens. The truth is, there is no right or wrong way to organize a computer. What would work for one person would never fly with another. The best way to figure out what goes where and keep on top the files, photos, documents, e-mails and applications is to create a system based on your personal preferences.

Consider that computers are both impersonal and personal at the same time. That is, they’re impersonal in the limited choices we have with the kind of computer we buy and the operating system it runs on. About our only choices are being able to decide between a laptop or desktop model, a Mac or PC, and of course, the programs we put in the computer (even though we’ll almost always have to use something from Microsoft!). Our so-called choices are extremely limited. And as a result, we don’t need to be a prisoner of the seemingly rigid digital world that emerges from that box we just brought home from the computer store.

Where the computer can be personal and an expression of who we are and the way we work. That style shows up in the way we set it up and use it. Here we have a lot of latitude. We can choose to store files, music, photos and other items where we want inside the computer, for the most part. We can create folders and files with names that reflect our personal preferences. In fact, the settings we choose for our computer reveal a lot about us. What we choose as our screen saver is a good example of a personal preference—as is our desktop. It can reflect who we are and how we like things to look. This freedom of choice, of course, extends to what programs we run. Whatever settings and software we choose for our computer, it’s important that our choices are driven by our thinking style.

The best way to set up and organize your computer is based on our natural tendencies. Buckminster Fuller said it best: “Don’t fight forces—use them.” We shouldn’t have to change what we are and how we like to do things to get and stay organized. The less we have to change, the more likely we’ll stick with it. It should be easy to save, store and sort the stuff on the computer so that it’s safe and quickly retrieved when we need it.

As original as computer users can be, we’ve found that their computing styles fall into three basic categories: EVERYTHING OUT, EVERYTHING AWAY and EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE.

Quick Quiz: What Style Are You?

1. Your e-mail inbox is . . .
 - a.) so crammed with e-mails—some read, some responded to, some just sitting there waiting for action, some you aren’t even sure are yours.
 - b.) contains only current e-mails, the rest are in folders, sub-folders or in the trash.
 - c.) which inbox? The one on my Blackberry, home computer, work computer or external hard drive?

2. The work area around your computer is . . .
 - a.) covered with little yellow sticky notes, piles of papers and other interesting items.
 - b.) neat and clean with nothing lying about. Your papers put away in files and your back-up disks are all labeled and organized chronologically.
 - c.) a combination of chaos and clutter with a dose of order thrown in for good measure. Your computer manuals are on a bookshelf—in another room. Under your desk are wires and cables—some for equipment you no longer own.

3. You can find what you need when you need it . . .
 - a.) in under a day, assuming it isn’t something important in which case you could come up with it in—what was the question again?
 - b.) in under a minute with a minimum of keystrokes.
 - c.) in under a minute if you’re feeling lucky, or within a week if you’re not. It all depends on which version you’re looking for and what format you want it in.

4. If your computer completely crashed, burned or was stolen, you would be. . .
 - a.) devastated. You’ve been meaning to back up everything but just can’t seem to find the time with all

you have going on. Plus, you're somewhat of a risk-taker and live life on the edge.

b.) fine. You save everything and have it stored in a safe place.

c.) confused. You back up your stuff from time to time in place to place. Most things on your computer—photos, music and contacts -- are invaluable so you have them automatically backed up. Thing is, you exceeded the storage capacity of the storage site so you opened another one somewhere.

5. The computer is . . .

a.) something you use to create wonderful things and a tool to help you reach your goals. When you turn it on, you're happy that it works.

b.) a complicated instrument that you find fascinating. When you turn it on, you wonder how it works.

c.) a blessing and a curse. It's an integral part of your daily life that takes up a lot of your time, which isn't always a bad thing. When you turn it on, you're glad it's working.

Your Score

Before we tell you how you scored, let us just say there are no right or wrong answers. It's important that you understand and embrace your organizing style and not be embarrassed or feel inferior for doing things your way. Put another way: "I'm not okay, you're not okay . . . and that's okay." Now on to the results. If you found yourself answering "A" to the above questions, you are likely an EVERYTHING OUT type of computer user. If you related more to the "B" answers, you probably prefer EVERYTHING AWAY. Finally, if answered "C" to the bulk of the questions, you have EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE. No matter which style of computing you prefer, there are ways to organize everything using your natural tendencies. Is one way better than the other? The answer is no. There is no right or wrong way, only your way. There's a good chance that you'll recognize parts of yourself in each category. And that's totally okay. That just makes you human. You may be an EVERYTHING OUT when you're in the middle of a project, but then are an EVERYTHING AWAY when you finish.

Style 1: Everything Out

If a messy computer is the sign of a messy mind, what does an empty computer mean? If you wonder why you have piles of paper in your work area, Post-it Notes covering the outside of your monitor and everything you've ever created out on your desktop, there is a good reason. (Actually, a few good reasons, listed below.) Finish this sentence: The easiest way to lose something is to . . . If you said "put it away," you're a typical EVERYTHING OUT organizer. You are visually oriented and like things out where you can see them. To make this style work for you, remember a couple of ground rules to harness you from EVERYTHING OUT to keeping key things where you can see them.

If you leave out the things you use most often—such as projects in progress or the things that make you feel good and help you reach your goals—then what's the harm in having some of your stuff easily accessible and highly visible? This approach can actually save time and make organizing easier—when done right. When done wrong (with no rhyme or reason), then you just have a mess. To develop a method to your messiness, take a look at some of the reasons behind having everything out and pay close attention to the solutions and suggestions included with each tendency.

- **Apple Computer User:** There is a good chance you use an Apple Computer . . . or want to. The Mac is designed with you in mind. Sorting and storing your stuff on a Mac is a lot easier for the person who prefers a simple, straightforward approach based on visual clues. Many of its features make leaving things out where you can see them a benefit to the user. (You can cycle through open windows with a quick shortcut or minimize them so they are open and out of the way, but easily accessible.) And if you ever want to put things away, it'll make more sense to you than Windows on a PC. It's true that a Mac isn't for everyone, but it may be better for you and your style of organizing. Macs, for the most part, crash a LOT less than their PC counterparts and come down with far fewer viruses to worry about, so backing up—although still critical—is not as dire as with other computers.

TRY THIS: If you are already a Mac user, take a look at the appendix at the end of this book for a series of specific shortcuts to organizing your Apple. If you're a PC user, what can we say? Maybe it's time for a change.

- **Addictive:** When you are into something, you are I-N-T-O it, big time. Being addictive by nature is not necessarily a negative. Let's say you are addicted to organizing. That wouldn't be so bad, would it? It's

more likely your addictive personality leads you to jump into things—hobbies, projects, software—with both feet before you go over the deep end and are drowning in the computer-related clutter. A month later you've lost interest and are onto the next great thing.

TRY THIS: There are no 12-step programs for computer clutter (that we know of) so what's a "passionate" person to do? Set some limits—about how much (only look at the top 10 sites when researching something), how long (I'm giving this an hour or day), or how big (when my hard drive capacity goes below blank, I have to let something go before I add something new)—you will go with something. Try the free demo software programs rather than buy them, to see if they'll hold your interest for the long term. Store everything related to your new "big thing" in one folder (with sub folders) so when you are "over it," it's easy to move it and move on.

- **All or Nothing:** It's an old (and true) axiom that things always take longer to complete than people think they will. Add to that the fact that the EVERYTHING OUT person usually doesn't have a good concept of time, and it's easy to see why the belief that organizing everything related to e-mail would seem something that could be done during the lunch hour. Not! Wait, it gets even more ambitious. When the EVERYTHING OUT person is ready to do something, it's game on. When they lose interest (or get distracted) it's game over. With only one shot to get it done and little or no chance the organizing project will ever be revisited, it's important to get it done right—and right now.

TRY THIS: The secret to big organizing projects for this person is three-fold. First, when they are excited, motivated and ready to go they should take that momentum and ride it for all it's worth and get as much done as possible. It may not be a perfect approach, but it's appropriate (and realistic). The motivation may be tied in with a milestone or major event. (Think: IRS audit). Maybe a breakup is a good time to discard a lot of clutter—old love letters and photos of you and your ex come to mind. Secondly, set aside enough time to do it right. A rainy weekend where you can actually work indoors on organizing your computer—without feeling like you are missing out on a glorious day. Lastly, take an all-or-nothing approach to only one area of your computer clutter.

- **Artistic:** Your first clue that an EVERYTHING OUT person is an artistic computer user is probably their laptop case. If it isn't unique and unorthodox enough, then the stickers on the outside of their computer should convince you—and we haven't even taken a peek inside yet. Artistic people like to personalize things and find inspiration from how things look and are less concerned with how things work. This leads to some interesting organizing choices when it comes to their computers. Since art is somewhat arbitrary, then who are we to judge what works for this type of computer user. The key word is works. This artistic approach to organizing has to protect their creations and make this medium (hardware and

software used in the creative process and the business side of the arts) easy to use, effective and not cause blocks to their creativity.

TRY THIS: The definition of “organized” is being able to find what you need, when you need it. How you do that is up to you—a personal approach. For artistic types, that could mean color-coding, coming up with clever folder titles and categorizing things that make sense to nobody but them. The true test: Can they find almost anything in under five minutes?

- **Big Picture Thinker:** There’s no such thing as “miscellaneous.” (It’s a catch-all for stuff that has no home.) Yet it’s used as a way to organize anything that doesn’t fit clearly into a category. It is also the most common place to store stuff that people are too lazy to put back where it belongs or aren’t sure exactly where to store it. (To them, the desktop’s the ultimate miscellaneous folder.) The big picture thinker is too busy to be bothered with some of the dirty details that need to get done to make organizing easier. Name photos to make it easier to search for them, and it’s too busy. Think through a system to make saving and storing things a snap. Gotta go. Take advantage of the preferences and parameters of the computer to automate organizing. Yeah, whatever. Tackle some of the tasks that will lead to less clutter on the computer. Nah.

TRY THIS: To the big picture thinker, details don’t matter. These are idea people with a lot going on and no time for monotonous and mundane organizing. (They also aren’t known for being able to break big projects down into manageable mini ones.) Here is an idea that should appeal to this person. Think of your computer like a little city. To organize everything set up zones. You’ll have a post office (e-mail), bank (online bill paying and money matters), a movie theater (video), music store (music files), office (work related stuff), playground (games), parking lot (projects in progress) and a self-storage (archived items). You could also think of your computer as USA Today with five or six broad categories to begin to break down all the clutter and get control of the chaos. Finally, try focusing on the outcome you seek and work backwards.

- **Busy, Busy, Busy:** Who has time to slow down to deal with trivial details like reading, responding, sorting, storing, purging and backing up e-mails? It seems there aren’t enough hours in the day to get and stay organized. The irony is, being organized actually saves time. The other reason to slow down and organize is you don’t miss as many magic moments. Giving yourself permission to do things like sorting your digital pictures, editing video footage, reading and responding to old e-mails and listening to some of your favorite songs while creating play lists reminds you of what’s really important in your life that’s easily overlooked as you live from task to task watching it whiz by.

TRY THIS: Organizing your computer takes time. The faster you can get it done, the more time you’ll

have to pursue your true passions. The obvious answer to being too busy to even set some of the system preferences on your computer may be to have someone else do it for you. If you can afford it, hiring help may be just what the (computer) doctor ordered. If that's not feasible, here are some other suggestions that will help you do more in less time. Use the Rule of Five to get it together. If something takes less than five seconds to start and five minutes or less to complete, do it now. The fewer loose ends you have to organize, the better. Or become a master multi-tasker. Answer e-mail while talking on the phone and going to the bathroom.

- **Clutter Bug:** To the computer user who finds comfort in clutter, everything is interesting, useful, valuable, relevant or sentimental. It's impossible to part with anything and since this stuff is digital, why get rid of it anyway? I agree. You don't have to get rid of anything you don't want to, if you have the storage space and store it properly. The rule of thumb: Keep out or easily accessible what's in play. Meaning the projects that are in progress and the programs you use regularly are on the desktop or your main hard drive. Everything else is tucked away in a safe place and organized so when you need it, you can get it. If you're a pack rat who doesn't want to deal with all the digital clutter clogging your computer, then read on.

TRY THIS: To cut clutter off at the pass, adopt a read and release policy. Read things and trust that you will remember the most important parts. You don't need to download and save every bit of information out there. If you feel you do, save the link but lose the download. If you have a PDF version of a manual, print it out and delete it from your computer. Put the print version under the TV, DVD player or surround sound system so it's there when you need it. (To change the time twice a year for daylight saving.) For things you can't quite part with but know in your heart of hearts are not important, create a folder on your computer called "Crap I Probably Don't Need" and drop these undecided items in there. Add an expiration date and delete everything in it if you didn't need it in a week, month or year. To get rid of the rest of the stuff that takes up disc space, start with easiest items first—duplicates. Then go to song that sucks, photos that make you look fat (or are blurry) and bookmarks that no longer work. Make a top ten or best of version of the rest of your stuff.

- **Dramatic/Eccentric:** There are a lot of people that thrive on solving problems—theirs. These people find chaos, crisis and turmoil interesting. They like to live life on the edge because it's much more stimulating. That's why (and the truth hurts) they relish the challenges their disorganization can cause. They could be organized if they wanted to, but then life would be boring. It doesn't make sense that someone would want to risk the potential problems not backing up, using and updating virus protection and misplacing documents and files can cause. But this self-destructive streak is real and being disorganized is a

symptom. They could carry duplicate cables in their laptop case in case one doesn't work when they get ready to do their PowerPoint presentation, but they don't. They hope there is one there and it will work. Yikes!

TRY THIS: We say take risks in other areas of your life—drink day-old milk, mail your bill on the day it's due or let your gas gauge touch empty before refilling—but don't do anything where you could potentially lose everything that's in your computer or become careless about protecting your identity. Think about the worst-case scenario when it comes to a computer catastrophe. How does that feel or as Dr. Phil would say, how's that working for you? Now imagine everything related to your computer is organized and protected. What would that be like? Whether the pleasure or the pain makes you realize you should get your act together (as it relates to your computer) we hope you do it.

- **Emotional:** They say you shouldn't love anything that can't love you back. Oh well. It seems that a lot of EVERYTHING OUT people become emotionally attached to words, music and images. They find meaning have feelings for everything from photos, songs and e-mails to old software, games and computer equipment. It's not rational (or practical) but it's real to them. They will have a hard time parting with old pictures—even when they are not flattering. Any e-card that was sent over the last decade must be saved, of course. They may even become attached to an old chain e-mail that made them laugh. This compassionate computer user may also suffer from M.S. (mood swings) and is susceptible to highs and lows—which makes it difficult for consistent organizing.

TRY THIS: Use your emotions to organize. Categorize things based on how they make you feel—songs that make you smile go in one play list and songs to cry by go in another. Take some of your best photos, videos and music and create a multimedia collage. Once you have this you can save and store the rest somewhere other you're your hard drive. Don't make big decisions about what to save or toss when you're too up or too down emotionally.

- **In the Moment:** Fear comes from the unknown and procrastination is result of fear. When you are in the moment you have a lot less stress, worry and fear. If you focus on what's in front of you and organize it, you will find this works really well. The only challenge is not having a vision for the future to know what's important, useful and relevant and what's not. To know what your goals are helps you decide what to keep and what to toss. It also assists you in determining what equipment will best help you get where you're going. Without goals you won't be thinking ahead and organizing your computer will be difficult without an eye toward the future.

TRY THIS: The best way to decide what you want your future to look like is to create it—using your computer. You can create a vision statement by grabbing free images off the Internet using Google's image

search. Type key words about what you want your life and career to be like in the coming years and see which images appear. Grab the ones that capture (visually) where you want to be in a year, two years or ten years. Now create slides with the words and phrases that say what you want to accomplish. Next, add music to the words and pictures and put all these ingredients together to create a slideshow that features your future. Match your organizing style and decisions based on your vision of the future—your future.

- **Intuitive:** Just like you might toss a scarf on a chair and hang a jacket over the door, you may tend to put things where you feel like it. If you do it enough, it will feel right. It becomes a pattern. Now you know where to look for the jacket and scarf the next time you need it. It's the same with your computer: If you hate the color blue, why would you ever keep the blue screen background that your computer comes factory-set with? If you prefer looking at lists of things rather than icons, why give in to the mainstream computer look of icon-bearing folders? If you prefer one centralized folder to work within, don't have 25 different folders on your desktop. If you feel yourself resisting the way your files are laid out, if your frustration grows as you sit down in front of your computer, or if you sense it takes too long to get things done online, then it's time for a change.

TRY THIS: Where is the first place you would look for something on your computer? That's where it goes. Pay attention to where you want to put things. Don't force it. Let go when the universe tells you what to do with an item. If you feel most comfortable filing digital photos in a folder simply labeled "Photos," by all means do it. If you're more visual and want to put it in a folder with a camera icon, go for it. Point is, it's your computer so organize it the way you'll find things quickest.

- **Lazy:** Maybe you believe in Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny, but we are here to tell you there are no elves that will come and clean up your computer clutter for you while you sleep. Hey, we're just the messengers. You can hire someone to organize everything for you, but chances are it won't stay that way unless you do it yourself in your own way. So why don't we "just do it" like the Nike slogan says? Because we are lazy, that's why. If something is quick and easy—it almost falls into place and is easier to do than not do, we are less than interested.

TRY THIS: Automate. That's right, make as many organizing tasks automatic by setting up your directory preferences to do the work for you. Don't put documents on the desktop, put them away. Make it easy to do that. Having one master folder for all of your documents makes it easier to back up. Use the "D-Day Approach". Create a deadline, delegate as much as you can and then DO IT.

- **Messy:** Messy is in the eye of the beholder. One person looks around your work station and sees a mess. You look around and see creative clutter, controlled chaos and a place for everything and everything in its place. Sure, only you know where everything is and what that place is, but it's the system—your

system. The problem with this approach is others see you as disorganized and possibly unprofessional. If you're an artist or musician, that's one thing. If you're a doctor or accountant, that's another. Let's assume you'd like to be a little neater for the sake of your career, relationships and because it's easier to organize with less stuff. (Plus, you did buy this book, so...)

TRY THIS: Maybe you can move some things to an "off-site" storage to tidy up your computer and free up some disk space. Create a clutter-free zone on your computer that's neat and clean and another (less visible and less important) area where you let your hair down and make it as messy as can be. If you want to be organized, make it something you think about every time you use your computer. Make your screen saver the picture of organized perfection—we realize you may not be able to see the images because they are buried under all kinds of clutter, but you know it's there. (Set some boundaries like this one: When I can't tell what my screen saver is under the clutter, I'll do a quick clean up.) Make N-E-A-T your password. Group like items together in a folder to hide them away. Chip away at it every time you have a chance.

Playful, Rebellious and Unorthodox: "Think Different" was Apple Computer's slogan for a while and that is probably also the credo for the EVERYTHING OUT types. If there is a fun and crazy ways to store something, this person will find (or invent) it. I think it's great to dare to be different. However, sometimes choosing an offbeat brand of software or computer can make it harder to organize things. It's also true that organizing (and backing up) isn't always about fun and games. Lastly, although rules are made to be broken, there are times when the tried and true way of doing something makes more sense because it works. We say, it's better to be creative with what you create, not how you store stuff.

TRY THIS: We pondered whether we should use reverse psychology, but these tips are real. (Or are they?) There are a many different ways to organize things and if you prefer to blaze your own trail, go for it. Just be consistent. If you truly hate the thought of using your time and energy to organize, it may be best to do it as distraction—I should be working on this important project but instead I'll rebel and organize my computer. (Insert sinister laugh here.) Maybe the motivation you need is a change of scenery. You're your laptop on a train, plane or in an automobile to somewhere unusual to clean up the clutter. Do it during odd hours—with another night owl who actually thrives on this stuff. Combine something you like doing—going to a bar, for instance, with organizing your laptop. Make a boring task like sifting and sorting old e-mails or documents into a creative endeavor. Pull a key sentence from each document you're dumping and create a story out of the random phrases.

Visual: We saved the best for last. (It's actually alphabetical, but this is the KEY reason for wanting everything out. Since seeing is believing, having everything out where you can see it makes perfect sense.

When something is out of sight it's also out of mind—and likely lost. Right? Besides, why put something away when you aren't done with it and plan to use it again? Just like you like to pile your papers on your desk (and floor and...) because you like to see them (and know where everything is this way) the same holds true with your computer desktop. Not to worry, we can make this a tendency you can work with and make it work for you.

TRY THIS: The obvious question is does this system work for you? If it does, then there is nothing wrong with having things out that are used often, works in progress or make you feel good. To make it easier to organize the clutter on your desktop try coming up with broad based folders to sort some of the stuff. Also, if you can come up with better names for the things you create your searches make it easier and faster to find them—even on a crowded desktop. When it comes to cleaning up and cutting the clutter, do it by deal with the things you can see. (Do it as you see it.)

Fast Fact

48% of American executives admit to having a messy desk but claim to know where everything is. In contrast, 12% say that although their desk appears to be organized, but they have no idea where to find anything. (Fast Company Magazine, September 2004)

True Story

Someone once asked horror writer Stephen King how he could write such gross stuff. His reply was, "I have the heart of a small boy, and I keep it in a glass jar on my desk." What scares me to my core (when it comes to my computer) is coffee. Coffee?, you ask. That's right, I spilled a full cup of coffee into my laptop last year. The horror! The whole scene happened in (what seemed like) slow motion. My wife brought me a fresh cup of Joe as I worked away in my office. How nice, right? Only I didn't see her set it down and to make matters worse, she didn't secure the lid. Bam! The contents of the cup (a large cup) poured into my Mac when I reached for the phone and knocked it over. I'll spare you the gory details but suffice it to say, my computer died a tragic death. Fortunately, my data (all of it) lived on. I had backups of my backups. Most people need to learn lessons the hard way. I hope my story serves as an example of what can happen and how you can write a happy ending to any tragedy—theft, crash and coffee spills.

Style 2: Everything Away

Chances are your computer is a fine-tuned organizing machine, but possibly you could use a check-up from time to time. Or—and this is fairly common—your computer looks organized, but you still struggle to find what you need and have a hard time deciding what goes where. Because nothing is lying about and you have folders for your folders everything is neat and tidy, but may not be organized. It's not how fast you can file it away that counts, it's how easy it is to find it again that matters most. The suggestions below will help be even more organized based on your highest priorities—control, closure and having a clutter-free computer.

The EVERYTHING AWAY computer user hates loose ends. They thrive on working on one thing at a time and finishing it. Even if it's not done, they prefer to live by the motto, “Out of sight, out of mind.” This means keeping things compartmentalized—in folders and filed away on your hard drive. In order to maintain a sense of control the goal (and goals are a big thing for this organizing type) is to put everything away. In a perfect world, everything would almost label itself and land in the perfect place on your computer. In the real world, being a perfectionist combined with a bit of compulsiveness can cause problems. Let's look at some of the reasons behind your need to leave nothing out and create a system so it's easier to store your stuff out of the way.

- **Analytical and Technical:** When you turn on your computer you know why and how it boots up. You read the manual for each software program you use and people come to you for advice when their computer is on the fritz. So how could this be a bad thing? It's not, actually. It's good to know your software and hardware inside and out. Chances are you know all those time saving commands that save keystrokes and clever ways to get the most out of each and every application you own. The only thing that can happen with this knowledge is that knowing how to put something away isn't the same as knowing where to put it.

TRY THIS: Figure out all the ways you can set-up and organize your computer and then analyze which would be best for what you do, what you want to do, where you are and where you want to be in your life and career. (Leave room to grow.) Set up a plan, guide or customized approach to make organizing easy and (almost) automatic. Use your knowledge of the inner workers of your operating system to support your analytical and technical organizing strategy.

- **Bottom Line and Business Minded:** You likely live by the credo; “Show me the money.” You want to

cut to the chase and probably tell others to just get to the point. It probable you want to be more organized, but don't want to do it. You're less concerned with the process and more interested in results. Unfortunately, organizing your computer can and should be a personal thing. It's a lot like those times in school when the teacher didn't care about your answer, they wanted to know how you got the answer. It's the same thing with deciding where to store your stuff and stay on top of organizing all your contacts, contracts, invoices and investments—those things that make you money.

TRY THIS: They say it takes money to make money. Our advice is to hire someone to help you set up a system to sort, save and store all the important (and not-so-important) stuff on your computer. But instead of saying to the person you hire to, "Call me when you're done," be a part of the process—at least as a consultant.

- **Compartmentalized.** Being able to separate work and play, business and family affairs is difficult for many computer users. Not for you. You put things into clear and distinct categories and keep them separate. Being compartmentalized means you like to work on one thing at a time and when you're done you want to discard everything that's not critical. It sounds cold and calculating, but you seek closure and closing out of program knowing you're done feels good, so does putting things away when you are no longer working on them. You hate loose ends and dislike clutter. You want to get things done and move on with the least amount of collateral clutter.

TRY THIS: You will be tempted to throw away anything but the final version of something because of your driving desire to not leave any loose ends lying around. There are times when you might want to go back and look at your original notes, rough drafts and photographs. Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. Instead, save each version of something as: Baby 1, Baby 2, Final Baby, baby. Put your early versions somewhere safe and out of view—but not out of reach. Keep your final version on your hard drive in its very own folder. Since you won't rest until you put things away when you're done with them, make it as easy as possible to return anything that isn't a work-in-progress . . . and even those that are.

- **Compulsive:** There are a lot of similarities between being compulsive and being a perfectionist (covered later in this section). The difference is a compulsive person can be driven to do something over and over even if it's not right or perfect. When it comes to organizing a computer, it could be that a compulsive person will continue to do things a certain way, even if it's not working.

TRY THIS: For instance, a compulsive person may feel the need to delete all sent e-mails. Why? They don't really know, it's just something they have to do. It means a lot less clutter on their computer, but going back to an old sent e-mail can be a time saver and possibly a lifesaver. So when it comes to compulsive behavior, the only way to deal with it is to use it for good—you are compulsive about backing

everything up and having a place for everything and putting everything in its place. You may also have to set some limits or boundaries. You may decide to ditch any sent e-mails dating back more than a year. That way you have the most current ones, but aren't burdened with the outdated versions. Maybe you limit your searches when researching something to just the top ten (or twenty) links. You start a read and release rule where you ONLY read things online and don't download the document—but save the link.

- **Controlling:** Do you ever wonder why everything on your computer has to be exactly the way you want it to be—at all times? It's possible you are a control (insert a word that starts with an “fr” and ends with a “ak” here.) There's nothing wrong with needing to be in control at all times. When it comes to your computer, it can actually be an asset. You have a way (your way) of putting things in their place and you stick to it. The problem is when you have to share a computer with someone else. Our advice is, don't do it. If you must, then split the computer by users so you can't see the chaos on their side. What you don't want to do is try to take the “It's my way or the highway approach” when it comes to organizing the computer because it will just piss people off. Your need to be in control is very real.

TRY THIS: When things go haywire in your life you find peace and comfort in knowing everything on your computer is just the way it's supposed to be—and out of sight and out of mind. When you have to leave things in disarray for one reason or another you will be itching to get back to your computer to straighten it all out. First and foremost, leave some time at the end of the day to put everything back the way you want and need it to be. Simplify. You will probably be better off with less software, less places drives, less e-mail accounts. You want to be able to stay on top of everything and streamlining is the answer.

- **Decisive:** When something digital like a invaluable photo, old song, key document, important presentation or sentimental e-mail is deleted, there's a good chance you won't be able to get it back. In some cases, that's the result you're looking for. Other times, a snap decision to delete something is disastrous. Decisiveness is good to get rid of computer clutter, but some things masquerading as junk are actually valuable. When it comes to organizing your computer, many times you can only be as organized as your hardware and software choices allow you to be. A hasty decision about which type of computer to buy and what programs to use will have an impact on how easy (or hard) it is to protect and put things away.

TRY THIS: In the real world many people have a junk drawer (or two) to put things that they aren't quite sure about. These things don't deserve their own drawer and can't be designated as valuable, but parting with them (at this time) wouldn't be prudent. The junk drawer only works well when you rifle through it once in a while when you're sure something clearly isn't important. A decisive person can have a junk drawer on their computer that serves as a buffer between ditching something and letting it sit for a short

while just to be sure. A folder on your desktop or an external hard drive or off site storage could be the place to put things you're pretty sure you don't need or want, but want to be sure before any trace of them is erased. When it comes to deciding how to organize your computer and where what to keep and where to keep it, take a step back and ask yourself a series of questions before making a hasty judgment call. Questions like these: What are my goals? What is most used and most important to me? How do I like to work? Where would I first look for this thing and where would I probably put it? Who else may need access to my computer? What's working now as it relates to being organized? What's not working and how do I wish it could be? What hardware and software would best meet my needs?

- **Detail Oriented:** Attention to detail is an admirable quality to possess—especially as it relates to your computer. Getting and staying organized requires you take care of a lot of the little things that lead to a neat, clean and functional system. The only problem with sweating the small stuff is you may be missing the big picture. With computers it's all about thinking ahead. Things change. Who knew we would be creating, downloading and storing so much video? These digital files take up a ton of space. The same goes for music and pictures. Now that everyone and their brother sends e-mails with attachments—and we are also creating, sending and saving PDFs like never before, memory is a key issue for your computer. It's a heck of a lot easier to save and store your stuff when you have the maximum (and then some) amount of memory.

TRY THIS: You almost have to be a sort of Nostradamus when organizing your computer. Just dealing with what you have now will cause problems in the future. Thinking about where you want to be, what you will be doing and what is likely to happen in your personal and professional life in the next few years will make it possible to grow into your organizing system rather than outgrow it.

- **Literal:** Chances are when you bought your computer you left all the original setting as they were right out of the box. Or, you read the manual for your computer and thought to yourself, that's great, but it's not exactly what I wanted, but you didn't do anything about it. You want to may have wanted to make some changes to the preference setting on your software but were afraid to because the manual says . . . You may feel you are organizing your computer with one hand tied behind your back—your mouse hand.

TRY THIS: Don't be afraid to personalize your preferences to match your needs. Organizing your computer is a lot easier when the settings on it (and your software) make it feel more natural and practical—to you, and not the person in Seattle or Cupertino, California who set those preferences.

- **Neat, Orderly and Meticulous:** There are a lot of people who can never be rich enough or thin enough. There is another group that is never organized enough. These hyper-organized people take organizing to Olympic levels. We say, give them a medal. The truth is the Gold Medal goes to the computer

user who can find what they need when they need it and are prepared for the worst-case scenario. There are no gold medals for the person who has a computer that shows perfect form when judging neatness, but fails when it comes to function. You want form and function—neat and orderly as well as organized. Neatness counts, but not when there are too many layers to find something and it's too hard to put away.

TRY THIS: The good news is this book contains all kinds of tips, tricks and techniques on how to become more organized so your computer can be the picture of perfection when it comes to being neat and clean. The bad news is, we don't advocate using all of them—at least not all at once. If being super organized frees you up to do the things you want to do—stop and smell the flowers, for example—then bravo. If, on the other hand keeping your digital world so neat and orderly you miss out on the real world then we may have missed the mark.

- **PC User:** The fact is, about 9 out of 10 computer users do NOT prefer a Mac. There must be a reason why these people are using a PC and running Windows. For each good reason to buy a PC with Windows, there are more reasons why being organized is so important. For instance, with the possibility of a complete meltdown of your computer a distinct possibility, backing everything up EVERY day is a necessity. One of the strongest selling points for picking a PC is there are a lot more options when it comes to your software choices. It can be overwhelming, actually. Staying on top of your programs—the related manuals—is easier with organization. Finally, since your PC with Windows is compatible with just about everything, you may have your data and valuable digital documents in more than one place. Again, organization is the key, and the tips throughout this book will be a big help.

- **Perfectionist:** If everything on your computer isn't just so it will drive you crazy. You have standards—high standards, time-consuming standards, unattainable standards—that have to be met before you can feel good about your computer. The strange thing is if everything isn't perfect you may tend to procrastinate organizing and just put things here or there until the time when all your ducks are in a row—which drives you crazy. We know, it's a vicious cycle, but one that can be broken.

TRY THIS: For anyone else, telling them to take the time (after work, over a weekend or gasp, while on vacation) to get everything just the way you want it would be crazy. But the high you will feel from having everything on your computer organized to perfection will be worth it.

- **Planner, Strategic and Linear:** The EVERYTHING AWAY person is probably a strategic planner who prefers to do things according to plan, in sequential order. There's nothing wrong with this when everything is going great and working according to plan. Ha! How often does that happen? Spontaneity will never be your calling card, but by being a little less rigid you may be able to be better organized. By fol-

lowing the rules of organizing—group things together and put them in folders and subfolders; keep like things together; the things used the most are easy to “reach” while rarely used stuff is stored on an external hard drive or discs—you have the guidelines to go by. But there may be exceptions to the rules and being able to adapt can make organizing in a less-than-perfect world a whole lot more likely.

TRY THIS: The best laid plans that go awry are better than a haphazard approach to organizing. Even if your step-by-step plan to keep the clutter on your computer under control gets a little off track, you are still going to be able to handle the enormous challenge of keeping your computer clean. A plan for organizing your computer should include a sort of site map or schematic that indicates what goes where. It should have a timetable for how long to keep things and when to archive them. Of course you would have a daily, weekly and monthly routine for backing everything up.

- **Safe, Conservative and Stubborn:** They say with great risk comes great reward. Our guess is you’re not buying it. You would rather be safe than sorry and you instead of lusting after all the technological advances that come out seemingly every day, you just keep on keeping on with what you know and what works. That’s great, if it’s really working. You have to ask yourself, are you better off than you were four years ago—and no, we are not talking about politics—or could you benefit from some of the latest and greatest software and hardware. In many cases the prices of things you put off buying that could make your computing life easier have come way down in price and are easier to use. When something in the computing world says new and improved, it really is both. Okay, let’s say you aren’t interested in anything new, how about making the most of what you already have? Is there a better way to organize something on your computer in half the keystrokes—or no keystrokes at all because it can be automated.

TRY THIS: You can be your safe and conservative self AND still explore what’s possible with your applications and your operating system. At this point you don’t have to do anything about your discoveries if that’s what you decide. But now you at least know what’s out there (applications that can make organizing easier) and what’s in there (things in the manuals of your current gear that you could change for the better) if you want to get more organized.

Fast Fact

85% of the information that businesses need to operate does not fall into structured formats of automated spreadsheets or databases. Instead, it exists in a wide range of unstructured content such as email, graphics or video. With so much diverse information, employees spend roughly 25-to-35% of their time looking for information needed to do their jobs. This disadvantage is likely to increase since experts predict businesses will create more information than has been created in all of history in the next three years.

Style 3: Everything Everywhere

The road to an organized computer is paved with good intentions for the EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE person. Chances are you have more software than most because you had to have the latest and greatest program. Over the years, this pattern of buying, downloading and borrowing (wink) different versions of software programs means you have a lot of loose ends. Each one held the promise of making your computing life easier and better but alas, you end up with stuff spread out in a multitude of forms and formats.

It could be that you did come up with a clever way to organize your documents, digital music and photos. Just when you get it the way you want, you get another stroke of genius and reconfigure everything. In between your revelations about the set-up of your computer and the software you're using (at that moment), you also like to tinker with where everything is saved and stored. This kind of chaos makes life interesting, but organizing challenging. There is hope. Below you'll see some of your most endearing organizing characteristics along with ideas about how to work with (and around) them.

- **Absent-Minded:** With everything everywhere it's all too easy to forget what went where and where things should go, not where they could go. People like this want to just get everything now that they need and then deal with the repercussions later. These are people who jump at variable rate home loans with favorable rates for the first two years. They'll worry about Year Three when it arrives. And then they don't even realize it's arrived, once it has. They're careless, although they probably consider it care-free. Well, ignorance is bliss. Until you really need to find something now. With no mental structure in place, how do these people ever expect to organize their computer, PDA and MP3 player?

TRY THIS Sit down long enough to devise a plan. Focus on someone you consider "together," and decide how that person would organize their computer. Maybe you even know how they already do it. Assuming you don't, put yourself in their mind for a minute. So if for instance, you think they would place all of their photos in one general folder, all of their music in another, contacts in a third, and so on – then consider imitating them. In fact, if you're that scattered where you don't know where to start, this is a proven process to try. At the very least, you've placed all of your loose ends into some recognizable form of semblance. From there, it becomes easier to further arrange files. That is, once all of your digital snapshots are in a folder called "Photos," you can then go within that folder and create sub-folders called "2006,"

“2007,” etc. and put the photos into the appropriate folder, based on when the photos were taken. Every further step you take requires less thinking, and will make your life so much easier.

- **Chaotic:** Too many kids, too much on their plate, and too many things going on, they just don't have a full two minutes to devote to anything. They'll download that huge pdf manual to their machine now, then try and find it later on after lunch. Chances are, they won't even remember that they downloaded it and then they'll download it again, taking up a chunk of hard drive space.

TRY THIS Just because your life is busy doesn't mean you aren't organized. It just means you haven't had the time devoted to organizing. Actually, chances are you've had an idea in your head for awhile on how you ideally would like your digital stuff to be organized. Now it's time to take action. C'mon – it's been bugging you to sit down and synch your cell phone with the contacts program on your Mac. The irony is that the more organized your digital life is, the more organized your physical life will become, as well. Don't believe it? When was the last time you pulled out the digital camera to catch your son's Little League game, got to the baseball diamond, took three pictures and realized your flash card was full? Had you only downloaded the photos from Sea World last week, you wouldn't be in this bind. So while you're busy doing all of your errands everyday, start thinking ahead about what things digital you might be encountering later in the day. Did you remember to charge the battery? Empty the memory card? TiVO that reality TV show? Make an effort to take command of this aspect of your life and you'll be amazed how less chaotic your future is.

- **Creative:** You live to your own drum beat and therein lies your problem: Creativity is another way of saying you live without boundaries. And that clashes with the mere concept of organization. After all, organizing is life with clearly defined boundaries. So if you space your desktop icons on your desktop to form a barbaric interpretation of your favorite football team's logo that co-workers can see only from 20 feet away, that may make you really popular in your office but you won't have a clue where a crucial file is when your boss asks you to produce it on a minute's notice. If you make your child's artwork your desktop background, how will you ever see past the details of her coloring page and find the file you really need. It's too busy looking.

TRY THIS Harness your creativity to your advantage. That is, take all of your daughter's artwork off your cubicle walls, scan them into your computer or take digital photos of them and download them to your computer, and then place them into your screen saver. Then keep the originals in a box. That way, your office still has your daughter's artwork on display – without the clutter. Keep a solid color as your desktop background, instead of a busy photo or piece of art, so that you can easily see all of the folders and files. Make your icons creative, instead. That is, for your photo folder, use a camera icon or your favorite snap-

shot. For your music folder, use a photo of your favorite musician. In other words, be creative.

- **Curious:** You like new gadgets and new software, and are always willing to try them out. Let's say the current version of your photo-editing software you use is working great, and you suddenly get an email telling you about a new-and-great trial version with amazing new features. You've gotta try it, so you download it, use it for the free 14 days and then realize it's not that great. Instead of deleting it from your computer, though, you leave it. Guess what? Next time you edit a photo, it tries to bring up the new-and-expired version. So you have to spend an extra couple of minutes reverting to the old version. But you still don't delete the trial version, and so this little dance keeps happening repeatedly every time you edit a photo, until you've finally had enough. There's another aspect of curiosity that doesn't mix well with organization, and that pertains to your sense of exploring the what ifs in your head. For instance, how cool would it be to have your audio book on both your MP3 player and your computer? That way you can listen to a few chapters, while you're jogging. And then when there's downtime in the office, you can plug in those headphones and take in another chapter. Uh...reality check. How do you remember where you left off on your morning run, while you're at your desk? You'll constantly find yourself thinking you were on Chapter 9, only to play that chapter and realize you already heard that part of the book and are really further ahead. While it seems great in concept – you'll finish the book in half the time – it doesn't work as efficiently in the real world.

TRY THIS: Once you try any new trial software, either buy it and replace the existing version, or junk it immediately. Once you've color-corrected a photo and cropped it, trash the original. If you've updated a spreadsheet, don't keep the earlier version. If you need to, just back these files up. In other words, don't let your curiosity for better and newer software start cluttering your system. Likewise, the same is true of hardware. How many old cell phones are lying around your office drawer? How many power plugs? If you still have that old Apple Newton, chances are good that you won't ever use it again. Like they preach in the "Clean Sweep" TV show, get rid of stuff when you're through with it.

- **Distracted/Divergent:** This is along the lines of the chaotic person described above. Except in this case, you're aware of all the chaos going on in your life and choose to get enveloped by it. Thus, if you're working on a project on your computer, such as entering contact information into Outlook, and the phone rings, you'll field the phone call, then afterwards look at the daunting task of entering more phone numbers and addresses and leave it for later. You're looking for a distraction, to avoid the task at hand. Or you think about one thing, then in mid-sentence start talking about another. Your mind jets off in different directions. Thus, organizing is an utter challenge to you – mainly because you find it hard to stay focused long enough to make it worthwhile. Sure, intellectually you know you'll be much better off orga-

nized, but you also know what the process is going to take and you don't know if you have the make-up to make it happen.

TRY THIS: When you feel a moment coming on, when you can focus, activate the digital voice recorder on your cell phone and verbally jot down your ideas for how you ideally want to see things organized. On your next similar moment, play it back and start putting into action your plans.

- **Disorganized:** You aren't on top of organizing your computer because that just isn't your thing. In fact, you live your whole life like that. And you can get away with it for awhile, until your laundry, to-do list and grocery needs pile up. You procrastinate at tax time, vowing you have all your receipts and paycheck stubs around your desk. Then on April 14, you discover things aren't exactly where you remembered leaving them. With your computer, it's the files and folders and projects that keep mounting. They're everywhere on your computer desktop, tucked away in folders and maybe even on backup thumb drives in the drawer. Then when you absolutely can't take the virtual clutter anymore, you face the unimaginable task of needing to put everything in its place. You vow to tackle all of the items that need tackling, but have no clue where to start.

TRY THIS: Let's face it: You lack the organizing gene. So ask for help – from either someone who taste you aspire to or someone you're willing to pay to organize your computer. If the former, find out how they do theirs. Ask for their advice and find out why they do it a particular way, and then follow suit. Let's face it – you bought this book because you're seeking help, or someone gave it to you because they can see your white towel. Read this entire book carefully. We can't solve your situation in one paragraph. Use a highlighter to note all of the little tips that will help you with your situation, and then refer back to them often, sifting through the pages as reminders.

- **Eccentric:** Oh, sure, everyone considers you a little bit different. And that's great, because people probably treasure the time they spend with you and value your opinion. But when it comes to handling your computer skills, well let's just say that having the best of all high-tech toys still won't make your organization skills any better. A messy person in their home says look at this mess like they're proud of it. I bet you don't have as much software as I do, product of their disorganization. They buy off-brands.

TRY THIS: A rare case, but we say go for it. Have your computer be as unique as you – so long as you know where everything is and can access it on a dime. If we tried squelching your eccentricity, your computer would no longer be personal to you.

Impatient: You don't have the patience to organize, right? You're asking yourself what difference it can make if files are properly stored on your computer, anyway, as long as they're in that laptop machine somewhere. Or why start organizing when you're just going to taper off at some point, never to return to

this new system. Besides, it's still going to take time to locate files -- regardless of how you store them.

TRY THIS: Well, once you start organizing, you're going to take a pride of ownership in your all-new system. Not only will you not revert, you're going to be looking for other aspects of your life that you can streamline. And if you're impatient, you'll truly appreciate how much quicker you'll be able to retrieve information, after your computer is organized. If you don't have the patience to organize, then hire someone -- or bribe a friend -- who's up to the task.

- **Inconsistent:** If you lack consistency in the way you file things away, chances are you are the EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE poster person. That's because you have music files on your iPod, your computer, your cell phone and PDA -- but we bet they're not identical lists. Remember that song you just had to download when you heard it at the beach -- and the only way to hear it again instantly was by downloading it to your phone? You promised yourself to copy it later to your master music list, but forgot. How about those photos from your vacation that your friend wants copies of? Are they still on the digital camera flash card or are they somewhere on your computer?

TRY THIS: Get ahold of your digital self! There's hope. Ask yourself where you tend to look first for files. Then that's probably where they should be residing. Try to group like files into an area on your computer or device. Make this your centralized source.

- **Indecisive:** You can't definitively decide exactly where to file something, so you put it in several places where you know it will be convenient. For fun, let's say it's a word processing document you're working on. And let's say you filed it in your client's folder, under recent projects, and again on your Treo (because you planned on editing it on a flight you took last week). Alright, answer really quick: Where's the most-recent version? If you even have to think about it, your indecision has hampered you.

TRY THIS We'll make the choice for you: It's time to organize. Now. And since you're probably ambivalent over a central theme to use for organizing, start with anything that's simple for you. You can always change it later on. So for example, if you want to sort items by type, put all of those in one folder and label it with something recognizable, for easy access. Now about those multiple versions of a file: You can still keep your client's file on both your Treo and computer, but remember to synchronize the versions at your earliest convenience, once you've edited one of them.

- **Moody:** This person was also described in the EVERYTHING AWAY category. If this is you, you have high highs and low lows. When the mood strikes you, you are all over organizing and are voracious about tackling the issue. But then when it comes to following through, you say "forget it." Or you've just seen the latest Spider-Man movie and decide to label all of your folders with super hero icons -- what a great idea! Until you actually turn on your computer the next morning and realize what a juvenile idea it is

-- after all, what if your co-workers walk in and see it? So you decide to spend an hour re-doing the icons. Not only have you wasted time, your computer has taken on yet another visual identity -- all because of your whim and how you're feeling at the moment.

TRY THIS: We're not asking you to deny your feelings, we're suggesting you don't keep your computer and peripherals hostage to them. If you recognize yourself as moody, use variations of your favorite color or your favorite baseball team -- anything that puts you in a cheerful mood.

- **Multi-Platform:** Stealing a line from the Stylistics, you are everything and everything is you. You own a Mac desktop computer, a Windows-powered PC, a Pocket PC and Palm Treo, an MP3 player, a GPS unit, etc. You are wired, no doubt. You don't miss an email. You get paged when your favorite hockey team scores a goal. And you can watch your stocks without getting off the toilet. But if someone asks you for an address, you have to check to see where you kept the latest version. In other words, you have all of these great devices and none of them are synchronized. Or maybe you tried, only to discover that the PC-to-Mac translation software from some independent company has a few bugs, so now all of the zip codes in your PC's Outlook are in your Mac Outlook's area code category. Regardless, you decided to simply live with the troubled results, knowing they'd be annoying.

TRY THIS: First off, synchronize the devices that need to be synched with each other. That is, if you take your smartphone with you everyday, make sure it's in synch with your computer's contact program -- all of them. And as a habit, synchronize everything nightly, so that none of these devices are ever out of synch. Next, centralize your sources. That is, when you get score or stock alerts, make sure they're all coming into the same inbox. Then get rid of the outdated alerts and emails, once you're through with them. When you are using multiple devices, things can pile up quickly. So the single-best advice we can offer here is to keep everything clean and remove the clutter. It won't seem as overwhelming after you've done this. Also, keep your file organizing simple. Categorize the files and folders by color or by client name. But remember to do it this way across all of your platforms, so that they synchronize quickly and easily. So next time your boss asks you where Mr. Jones's proposal is, you don't need to check each of your devices until you find the latest version.

- **Optimistic:** You think the best of every technology, so you just know you'll never have a computer breakdown. Even if things go awry with a virus or breakdown, things will always turn out okay. After all, these products wouldn't come to market unless they were fool-proof, right? Wrong!

TRY THIS: Optimism can sometimes make you gullible. So back up all of your digital stuff. And keep that backup disk, hard drive or flash card physically somewhere safe. Don't try every new trial software that strikes your fancy. Think first if you really need it on your PC. Because nearly every trial version of

software – especially those from large companies such as Adobe and Microsoft – come loaded with other programs that you probably don't want on your computer. Many are a bear to get rid of (ever tried uninstalling an anti-virus program?) It's okay to be optimistic, it's not okay to make your machine vulnerable.

- **Procrastinator:** Hey, why organize now what you can organize later -- or better yet, have someone else organize for you later? Thus, you keep letting emails, photos and word documents stockpile all over your computer. You might think you know where everything is, but eventually you come to the realization that you don't.

TRY THIS Adopt the Just Do It mantra – at least until you restore order. If you're putting it off because of the sheer size of what needs to be done, then do it in small installments – but stick to a schedule. In fact, do the small chores first, to get you in the spirit. Then start tackling the heavier loads. Every little bit helps, as long as you stick to the plan.

- **Process Oriented:** You're more interested in the process of creating something, but don't care what happens after it's created. The end result means nothing to you. Rick, a good friend, loves to start home-improvement projects around the house, His wife is always complaining -- because she's nothing like him. "Take a look in our guest bathroom," she invites. The bathtub has been beautifully tiled, but there's no faucet to actually use the tub. "Three months it's been like this," she moans. "Now come into our backyard. See the beautiful half-deck out there. He started that when he got bored with the bathtub. Once he got halfway done with it, golf season started -- leaving this project shelved until the fall. I'm sick of it." It should come as no surprise that Rick's computer resembles his personality -- he loves downloading TV shows, movies, music, photos and home videos – and then sling-boxing them to the big-screen TV in the next room. Problem is, there are lots of folders started on his computer that have a few files here and there. Instead of one central home video folder, for example, he has several -- and some contain the same files as each other! Rick enjoys creating neat-looking files and using the latest editing software and high-tech gizmos, but has less interest in the end result. Regardless of if it's on his computer or one of his home improvement projects, the common thread in his life is that each little item really only needs a few minutes more of work, to be completed. But Rick leaves it for later. Or he eventually wants to completely re-do it.

TRY THIS Create an attack plan – put it on paper – and then go for it. But this time, cross out each step as you finish it, so that you can see your physical to-do list getting shorter. That will inspire you to see it through until the end.

Risk Taker: What have you got to lose, throwing an important file on the computer desktop and another on your PDA, and leaving that great family portrait on your camera's flash card? And you don't bother

backing any of it up. And you might leave important phone numbers solely in your cell phone's contact list. What could possibly go wrong? How about your husband borrowing your computer and accidentally deleting your files? The kids messing around with your PDA and crashing it to the point of no return? A virus infiltrating your computer via your wireless modem? Or leaving your cell phone in the grocery cart?

TRY THIS Being reckless is not a particularly bright approach to take with digital products. Try starting a routine in which you back up your data. You can even buy an inexpensive hard drive – less than \$100 – that comes with software that automatically backs up your data nightly. Turn off that wireless modem, when it's not being used. Run anti-virus software in the background of your PC. If you don't, then scan your hard drive before you go online to use your credit card or do online banking, and then again immediately afterwards. At the very least, turn the built-in Windows firewall on, if you own a PC. Mac users are pretty lucky that – despite some recent media sensationalism – there's really no need to run anti-virus software at all, as computer viruses don't typically target Macs. If your kids want to play computer games, by all means let them. If you're taking the necessary precautions, there's nothing to worry about.

- **Spontaneous:** Living for the moment, you tend to be careless -- or carefree, depending on your perspective -- and place your files wherever, whenever. As a result, your computer desktop reveals a mish-mosh of files, photos, songs, electronic bill statements, emails, etc. with no structure at all. That may fly in other aspects of life, but not when it comes to your computer.

TRY THIS Take the bull by the horns. Since you are spontaneous, use it to your advantage. That is, when the mood strikes you, take all of that bundled-up energy you have and put it into organizing your files. Put all of your old digital photos on a neatly labeled CD or DVD. Make sure your MP3 player is synched up with your computer. Get all of your electronic bill statements in order. Whatever it takes to get a semblance of order, do it. Then when you're back to your old self tomorrow, you'll naturally find it much easier to put things in their proper virtual place.

Fast Fact

According to a study by the Journal of Clinical Psychology, 36 percent of us break our New Year's resolutions by the end of January.

Closing Thought

“Everyone excels in something in which another fails.” —Latin Proverb

True Story

The little time Cindy devotes to her computer she does in chunks. A typically busy working housewife and mother, she checks her email every couple of days, downloads a batch of digital photos weekly, and shops online every now and then. Since she's also the main user of this particular machine, she stores her digital stuff everywhere on it. Its desktop screen overflows with photographs following no particular naming convention; MP3 files bearing either the artist or song name that they were labeled with when she received them; a few school project folders that her son has worked on the past two years; some trial software; a few computer games that her kids like to play; a contact address book; shortcut icons to both of her email accounts; a couple of home videos; and various other files. It's her digital purse, really. Any outsider would think it looks cluttered, but it could actually be even busier – if only she knew how to make her family portrait the desktop background photo! And with all of that disorder, she's really content with its appearance. Rather, she just hasn't thought much about it.

Happy as she seems, ask her to grab that photo of the kids with Mickey from last year's Disney World trip and she has no freakin' clue where to find it – even if it's right on her desktop front and center. When she calls her husband from the road and asks if he can look up someone's phone number in her Outlook, he impolitely declines. You see, he's organized. He makes his living from his computer daily, so he keeps everything orderly – folders are physically aligned, follow a rigid naming convention, are colored by category and are all backed up nightly. Not only does he get frustrated traversing his way through her computer, the mere sight of it instantly puts him in a sour mood. It's no wonder she's always losing things, he tells his buddies. A computer truly reflects the way someone thinks, and this couple is living proof that opposites attract – while perpetually being at polar odds.

Can't we all just get along? Yes – as long as we don't have to share computers. Everyone should be free to have their digital world be a natural extension of their physical realm. No matter your personality type, you're the one who has to deal daily with your very own computer, PDA, cell phone, Blackberry, GPS unit, MP3 player and every other type of digital device. Therefore, those gadgets should cater to your specific personality, so you can get the most out of them.

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