

WORK SMART

Organizing Your Files

The key to using a computer easily and effectively is to be organized. Of course, for beginning computer users, this may sound a bit too simplistic. What about learning how to use the applications? The truth is, if you use the computer for a while, you will learn the applications you need, but even the most competent user can still become lost in system that is not well organized.

The hard disk drive is usually the biggest problem, because it is the primary storage device. Having a disorganized hard drive is similar to putting all your mail in a large closet without shelves. You know that this month's bills are in there somewhere, but you may need to wade through seven bales of junk mail and magazines to find them. Actually computers can be worse than that, because you can look through all the paper in the closet and, with patience and a lot of time, find what you need. On a hard disk, however, many of the important files may have names like WR45_TYN.XEL.

To help you with the problem, here is a list of 10 hints for keeping your files organized.

1. Before you begin creating a grand scheme for organizing the files on your hard disk, analyze what you do regularly. Make a list of the programs that you use and the documents that you create.
2. If possible, ask other coworkers whose jobs are similar to yours how they do organize their files. There's no point in reinventing the wheel. Take advantage of other people's experience.
3. If you are using DOS-based systems without any other interface (such as Windows), create batch files for the programs you use frequently. With a batch file, you can start a program without first navigating through your directory structure to the directory that contains the program. This may seem simple, but it will save you a lot of time. With Windows, and the Mac you can simplify the process of launching programs by setting up icons, which represent the programs, right on the desktop. To start a program, just double click the icon.
4. Although following step 3 will streamline your work, it is important to keep your root directory or the desktop uncluttered. If you use DOS batch files, keep them in a BATCH directory, not in the root directory. If you use a GUI, keep the desktop clean. Don't create desktop icons for every program you ever use.

5. Keep directories small. When you put too many files in a directory, it starts to get unwieldy. "Too many" in this case is a relative term-it depends on the type of file and the naming system you have enabled. But when a directory gets unwieldy, create subdirectories.
6. When naming files, try to use as much plain language as possible.
7. When you use DOS, Windows, or the Norton Desktop for Windows, you are stuck with eight character file-name limit, which forces you to create some kind of code. Just make sure to stick to one code.
8. It is vitally important that you backup old files onto some other form of storage medium, and then erase the backed-up files from the hard disk. No matter how big a hard disk may seem when you buy it, you will fill it up if you don't get rid of old files.
9. If you have old files that you need only occasionally, you might want to use a file compression utility. For example, if you want to keep list of last year's invoices on your hard disk, you can save space by packing them all into a single compressed file, such as INV_2004.ZIP (ZIP is a common type of compressed file).
10. Once in a while, print out the directory structure of your hard disk and pin it on the wall.