

See What They Had to Say: The Top Business Blogs Winners



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This HP eBook was created just for you. And perhaps, it was created with you. We gave members of our Small & Medium Business Printing Wiki the opportunity to vote on the best business blogs in the categories of Management/Innovation, Productivity, Marketing and Entrepreneurship. The winners are here for you to download and print so you can reference it whenever you need encouragement or advice.

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10 Tips for Keeping Your Desk Clean and Tidy

Posted by Lifeclever, Chanpory Rith on August 21, 2007



Productivity



A messy desk is a sign of creativity and imagination. This is the excuse I gave myself for the mountain of papers, knickknacks, and San Pellegrino bottles normally piled on my desk at work. Truth is, I'm just lazy. When I started wasting more and more time looking for lost items instead of being a brilliant creative person, I knew I had to do something. I got my desk organized, and have been miraculously keeping it clean for the past three months.

Here's how:

1. Use a system to manage paper

Most of the clutter on my desk is paper. In a recent post, I wrote about a system for organizing files on the computer. The same system can be modified to work with physical files: Setup: A place for everything.

First, you'll need a few items:

Inbox

This is a standard stackable letter tray. Put documents that don't yet have a place in here. This may be items like memos, print-outs, and random things placed on your desk by random people.

Incubate box

On top of your Inbox tray, stack another letter tray to put items that are "on hold." These are items you aren't yet ready to do or complete in here. They may be articles you're thinking of reading, sketches for potential projects, and information about events you might attend.

Action & Tickler file

For this, Merlin Mann of 43 Folders recommends an A-Z accordion file. Put papers requiring an action that takes more than 2 minutes in here. This may be items such as forms to fill out and documents to proofread. You can also use a tickler file to supplement this. Check out Merlin's tutorial for more details.

Current projects rack

For this, use a file rack or small file box to hold folders for active projects. Create one folder per project.

“If it takes more than two minutes to do, put it in your Action or Tickler file. Or if it’s project-related, put it in your current projects file rack.”

Filing cabinet

Put completed projects, general reference items, and anything else you might want to look at again in a filing cabinet. Use simple flat folders organized from A-Z, instead of hanging folders.

Dump boxes (trash can, recycling bin, shredder)

I avoided throwing away paper because I didn’t have access to a trash can, felt guilty about tossing recyclable paper, or was afraid of throwing away confidential materials. Having a trash can, recycling bin, and shredder for each of these situations eliminates these hesitations.

Usage: Process, Organize, Review—You’re now all set and ready to clean your desk. The steps below are adapted from David Allen’s GTD system:

Process:

Put all papers on your desk in your Inbox tray. If it doesn’t fit, just put it next to it for now. Go through each file one by one. Ask yourself: can I act on this file? If yes:

Do it

If it takes less than two minutes, just do it.

Delegate it

If you’re not the right person to do it, then send it to someone who can.

Defer it

If it takes more than two minutes to do, put it in your Action or Tickler file. Or if it’s project-related, put it in your current projects file rack.

Organize:

If the file has no action for you to do, you can:

Trash it, recycle it, or shred it, if you don’t need it.

Put it in the Incubate tray if you’re not ready to deal with it.

Archive in your filing cabinet for later.



Review

The most important part of the system is setting up reviews for you to process your Inbox and organize your files:

Daily

Process your Inbox as often as you like throughout the day, but do it at least twice a day: once around noon and again at day's end. You must empty it at the end of the day, so that your inbox is nice and fresh in the morning.

Weekly

At the end of the week, move completed projects into your filing cabinet. Go through your Incubate tray and decide if you're ready to act on any of the files, following the steps you would to process your Inbox. Take items in your recycling bin to the main recycling bin in the office.

Monthly

At the end of the month, go through your filing cabinet and prune any files you don't think you'll ever need again.

2. Banish Post-it notes

Stop using Post-its to remind yourself of important information. They're just too easy to lose and they're ugly when plastered all over your monitor. Instead, keep a little notebook on your desk to write down reminder notes. Better yet, use GTD tools such as the hipster PDA and kGTD to keep track of what you need to do.

3. Trash those printouts

After printing a file and completing the action associated with it, throw it away. You already have a copy of it on your computer, so you don't keep it lying around on your desk.

4. Keep blank file folders and a label maker at your desk

The reason why you don't file is because it's so tedious to find folders and label them. With a stack of blank folders and label maker within reach, you have no excuse.

"I got my desk organized, and have been miraculously keeping it clean for the past three months."

5. Ritualize your reviews

Schedule time in iCal or other calendaring program to clean your desk at the end of each day. After two or three weeks, the habit will stick.

6. Throw away pens

Why do you need so many pens? Throw them all out except for two or three. If it doesn't have a cap, toss it.

7. Say no to schwag

Yes, it's hard to resist the ugly free crap at conferences and internal office events, but avoid taking them just because they're free. This includes all those cheap pens, stickers, free magazines, brochures, postcards, and anything else that will likely end up littered on your desk. If you need a reminder of a particular vendor, take your PDA or notebook with you and write the company's name and URL down.

8. Take your books home

Take home any books you don't use on a regular basis for work. You'll have more space to work, and if you have to leave your job for any reason (heaven forbid), you'll have fewer heavy items to pack.

9. Eat away from your desk

Eating at your desk encourages trash like paper bags, cups, and utensils to stick around your desk. I've been guilty of this and have the crumbs in my keyboard to prove it. To prevent this, eat somewhere else. Preferably, out of the office. Doing this also allows you a mental break from work where you can enjoy your meal without phone or computer interruptions.

10. Limit photo frames on your desk

Pictures of loved ones remind us of what's important in our lives. More than three on your desk, however, is a distraction. Instead, use Flickr to store photos which you can view in a slideshow during a break.

Marketing

Marketing:

How the Perfect Marketing Plan Would Work

Posted by DuctTape Marketing, John Jantsch on September 20, 2007

Marketing

“ Your marketing must have a life and the only way it can do that is if you throw it into the middle of your day to day business. ”

Depending upon who you ask a marketing plan is either a necessary evil or tremendous waste of time. That's such a shame, but I think I've finally come to understand why this is.

A well crafted marketing plan should be one of the most important strategic steps a business takes, but there's a disconnect. Marketing plans get created, but never used because, once put to paper or ether, they don't easily relate to the real life experience of a business. They get created but never installed.

At a minimum your marketing plan should include:

- a description of your ideal customer
- your core message (vs. competitors)
- your key marketing strategy
- your communications tools
- your lead generation plan (advertising, public relations, referral)
- your web plan (yes, with a blog)
- your lead conversion plan
- your customer loyalty plan
- your marketing calendar
- your marketing budget
- your key strategic indicators
- scads of sales, revenue and profit projections

Marketing



Now, the creation of the above is a great start and a beneficial exercise for any business, new or existing, but here's what's needed to truly make your marketing plan work.

Your marketing must have a life and the only way it can do that is if you throw it into the middle of your day to day business. As a document it's a fantasy and it stops breathing the minute you open the door each day. A truly effective marketing plan must integrate into the reality of the stuff you do each day.

You create the plan as prescribed above, you bake the appropriate elements of your plan into your CRM system, you tie the plan to your actual sales, you flow the plan projections into your bookkeeping software and you circulate actual results through your key indicators, automatically updating your projections. Now that would make a living, breathing powerhouse of a marketing plan and, now, your marketing plan would actually run your business (as it should be).

I'm not sure the specific software to do what I've described actually exists today, but I'm betting a web application bringing together current offerings from some of the smart folks at a Palo Alto Software, Microsoft, SAP, NetBooks, Intuit, Sage, Zoho or NetSuite couldn't be that hard to hack together.

I know there are plenty of BigCos and VARs out there that have created something like this for the enterprise market, but what about one for the real small business (2-50 employees)?

Working On, Not In, The Business

Posted by Small Business Trends, John Wykcoff on October 16, 2005



How often have you heard a trainer or consultant say that as the owner of the business you should be working “on it” rather than “in it?” I’ve said it often myself. Fortunately, no one has ever asked me exactly what that meant. It appears to be a cliché or phrase that has become accepted although not clearly defined or understood.

So, what’s the difference between working on or in your business? Employees work in the business. Most have specific duties or tasks to accomplish on a regular basis. Most know what’s expected of them. The “boss” however, doesn’t have such a clear path and few were trained to be bosses. Their tasks are self appointed and, based on my observations, quite varied from owner to owner. The result is that many work in the business sometimes and on it at other times. It appears to be a matter of priorities and fires.

All too often the boss spends much of his or her time fighting fires. Rather than an owner working on the business they have become crisis managers. Many sit in their offices and wait for someone to come through the door with a problem that needs attention or resolution—now.

Most owners seem to be pretty good at handling crisis problems. Some even call them “opportunities.” The reality is that the owner has trained his employees to bring all problems that need immediate attention to them. This, of course, takes the responsibility away from the staff and puts it squarely on the owner’s shoulders. I see extreme examples when a store is being remodeled or expanded. The owner then becomes the construction foreman, the architect, the designer and the one who knows where all the materials can be found.

Through it all, the store keeps on running. Sales continue to be made, orders for inventory are placed; each department does its tasks. The employees know what to do on a day-to-day basis. So far there seems to be no reason to change the situation. However, there is also no leverage, no long term planning, no continuing education and the owner is getting little input other than from staff members. And most of that is negative.

Okay, so what would change if the owner started working on the business? First, he or she would not be the first one in and the last one out. He wouldn’t necessarily come to the store every day. She would be circulating in the community making contacts with other owners of small businesses getting ideas. He would seek out organizations made up of like-minded business people in his community. She would be joining associations like the Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, and the Lion’s Club. Once a member the owner would be attending regular meetings to become an integral part of the community.

“**Most owners seem to be pretty good at handling crisis problems. Some even call them “opportunities.” The reality is that the owner has trained his employees to bring all problems that need immediate attention to them.**”



The owner would be expanding his or her circle of associates and yes, even friends, outside the industry. He or she would be spending “think time,” that quiet time spent thinking about the future and how to use all that knowledge bottled up inside but not exercised because of day-to-day pressures.

As I travel and talk to owners I often hear them complain that they don’t get as much time to do the things they like anymore; that they are working longer hours than ever and they are beginning to suffer from burnout.

Well, Bunky, burnout is not uncommon. It’s not something only a few suffer. If you’ve been in the business for a decade or more you’ve probably suffered some level of burnout, distress, angst that seems to be almost impossible to resolve. You’ve been spending the majority of your time solving other people’s problems. You’ve come to accept it as just part of the business. It doesn’t have to be that way.

Only you can change you. Your quality of life has to be a high priority. Some dealers have discovered that once they give their subordinates more latitude to make critical decisions those staff members rise to the occasion and become better managers themselves.

Will they make mistakes? Count on it. People don’t learn by doing repetitive work. They learn by making judgment calls that are not always right. They learn by being given the authority and responsibility to do a better job. As an owner it is your responsibility to mentor and coach your managers and have them do the same for those who report to them.

There is an adage that says: “If it can be measured it can be managed. If it is measured it can be improved.” Working on your business should mean that you have the tools to measure and manage and more importantly, your managers have the training to measure and manager those who report to them.

We are truly in the digital age. Computers, cameras, even phones have moved from analog to digital. Your business must do the same. You have the hardware. Now, as the owner must learn what those digital reports mean and what you need to do to implement and monitor them.

On the analog side you do need to hone your mentoring and coaching skills. Fact is your staff is closer to an extended family than a working team. Like it or not you are the Daddy or the Mommy as well as the Chief of Police and coach. However, you shouldn’t be the sole fireman.



“Only you can change you. Your quality of life has to be a high priority.”

Why Your Business Needs an Internet Policy

Posted by Small Business Trends, Anita Campbell on August 5, 2007

What started out as a practical joke turned out to be a major incident—and a major diversion of company resources. Before all was said and done, we had a half-dozen employees working to investigate the mess and resolve it, and had brought in outside legal counsel. And of course there was the loss of productivity of both the message recipient and the practical joker.



“ *This whole scenario drove home to me the need for a written policy about usage of the company’s electronic resources, including email and the Internet.* ”

A young woman comes to see the company HR Manager because she has received a message from a “Secret Admirer” on the company email system. Most of the message was innocuous, but it concluded by saying, “I’ve been watching you.”

The person who received the message was a basket case. This took place more than eight years ago, at a time when people were not used to receiving bizarre emails on a daily basis from people they don’t know (i.e., spam).

Still, the woman’s strong reaction was surprising— that is, until you heard the whole story.

It seems that the young woman’s sister had been stalked by “an admirer” and murdered. So, receiving a message by a secret admirer who claimed to be watching her was taken as a major threat. Could you blame her for reacting strongly?

The message contained a few details suggesting it was sent from someone inside the company (even though it displayed an external email address). The head of IT was brought in. His staff conducted some excellent forensic computer work.

They traced the email back to another employee. It turns out that the message came from a co-worker using a company computer on company time. The co-worker was another woman on the same team as the message recipient—someone who sat a few cubicles away.

After an investigation the company executives were satisfied that the email was a practical joke. The sender had been bored and showed very poor judgment in how she decided to amuse herself. She did not know about the history with the other woman’s sister because it had occurred in another state.

So how did this situation turn out? The recipient of the message took several weeks off of work while seeking counseling. The practical joker, who was a star performer otherwise, was required to apologize in writing and given a written warning. Shortly thereafter the practical joker left the company, no doubt realizing she had just committed a career-limiting move.

This is a true story. I actually was involved in it.

Back in the day when I was a corporate executive, I did a stint as Vice President of Human Resources. I was faced with the task of sorting out this situation and dealing with the aftermath.

What started out as a practical joke turned out to be a major incident — and a major diversion of company resources. Before all was said and done, we had a half-dozen employees working to investigate the mess and resolve it, and had brought in outside legal counsel. And of course there was the loss of productivity of both the message recipient and the practical joker.

This whole scenario drove home to me the need for a written policy about usage of the company's electronic resources, including email and the Internet.

At the time, email and Internet usage was not nearly as widespread as it is today. In fact, one of the problems I faced in disciplining the practical joker was that our company policy barely mentioned email and the Internet. Not to mention this important point: it would have been helpful to have made employees aware of proper email and Internet usage up front. We might have been able to “save” that star performer.

After that situation, however, we immediately re-wrote our policy.

I suspect many of you in your own businesses are in similar positions. You have rudimentary or nonexistent policies for Internet and email usage.

But, trust me. True life is stranger than fiction. Situations like this are just around the next corner.

