

Making The Most Of Your Home Office Space

By Ramona Creel

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You don't have to be Fortune 500 CEO to need a functional office. But, unlike many high-ranking CEO's, you may be working out of a back bedroom -- or the corner of your dining room -- and you are probably on a BUDGET. However, that doesn't mean that you have to put up with inefficient, uncomfortable, and unproductive work spaces. You can have everything you need to work effectively from home, without spending a fortune.

CHOOSING A HOME OFFICE SPACE

Where is your "home office?" A corner of the kitchen? The spare bedroom? Perhaps you work out of a cubbyhole -- or you might be fortunate enough to have an entire room set aside for paperwork. In choosing your home office space, first ask how you plan to USE it -- for managing personal paperwork, occasionally bringing business home with you, or working full-time out of the house. Will you need a separate phone line, connection for your modem, or room for other equipment? Do you plan to bring clients or other colleagues to your home office? Whatever space you adopt, make sure to avoid any TERRITORIAL DISPUTES with other household activities. Your kids don't need to play monopoly on your desk -- and you shouldn't have to move your work off the kitchen table to serve dinner.

CREATING A PORTABLE OFFICE

You might not have the luxury of picking one set spot in your house for your office -- you might end up being a bit more nomadic because of space limitations, the nature of your work, or even personal preference. If you plan to work in different areas of your home (or take your work with you outside of the house), start out with a plastic file box or cabinet on casters which can serve as your portable filing system. Of course, you may not want to haul every single piece of paper with you everywhere you go, so be judicious about what you choose to include in your files. Other less-commonly accessed paperwork can live in a box in the closet or a file drawer in the basement.

Don't forget your supplies -- either choose a file box with an attached supply bin, or throw in a tackle box that can hold your pens, paper clips, stapler, sticky notes, and whatever else you need close at hand. And if you like a little privacy while working in one of your home's "high traffic" areas, consider a privacy panel or portable screen. You can select something functional or decorative, depending on your tastes - preferably something that can be disassembled and stowed away in just a few minutes.

YOUR WORKSTATION

A workstation doesn't have to be an elaborate affair -- many people get by with no more than a desk and a telephone. How you design your office depends on what you plan to do there. What keeps you busy -- writing letters? Balancing your books? Phone calls? Computer work? Keep these activities in mind as you plan your space. If you need room to SPREAD OUT while you work, make sure to include a large flat surface. Do you have a lot of machinery -- scanner, fax, postage meter? You might want to bring in a printer stand or a bookshelf for your equipment. Do you plan to see clients in your home? Then you might need a separate "conference area" -- perhaps your dining room table can work double duty. Just give some thought to matching form with function before you go shopping for furniture.

STORAGE SPACE

Many people who work at home find that they run low on storage space for supplies. Take a good look around your office. Where can we create some storage? Start by looking up -- could we put in some bracket shelves above your desk or credenza? What about sitting a document sorter or series of stacking trays on top of that file cabinet for letter or legal size items -- letterhead, sheet protectors, index dividers, manila folders? And if you are in an extra bedroom or other room with a closet, you are in luck! Consider installing some wall-to-wall shelves or simply placing a bookshelf inside. Some of my clients have used old dressers, end tables, or plastic drawer systems for organizing their supplies and extra equipment in a spare closet. Remember, your storage center does not have to be conventional -- it simply has to be functional.

ERGONOMICS IN ACTION

Does your office give you a pain in the neck -- literally? It has been proven time and time again that you work more efficiently -- that productivity increases when your office space is designed to be ergonomically correct. The first step is to make sure that all of your vital equipment and supplies -- the ones that you use daily -- are within ARMS REACH. You should be able to get at everything you need without bending, squatting, or stretching. Now take a look at your computer -- the monitor should be at eye level and your wrists should be flat when you are typing or using the mouse. If not, you can raise up your monitor or attach a keyboard tray to your desk. Finally, have a seat. Are your thighs parallel to the floor, your calves perpendicular, and your feet planted flat on the ground? If not, you might want to consider adjusting your chair or bringing in a raised footrest. As you sit at your desk, pay attention to what your body is telling you. If it causes you discomfort, fix it!

FINDING THE DEALS

We've talked about a lot of specific items that you might consider using in your home office -- but don't think that you have to spend a lot of money on expensive furniture. You have a number of different options:

- ASSEMBLE-IT-YOURSELF -- Melamine has come a long way! You can find durable, inexpensive, attractive, and functional furniture that comes in "kits" from nearly any office supply store.

- USED OFFICE FURNITURE STORES -- If you are looking for a particular item, either check back regularly to see if the piece you want has come in, or ask to be contacted when a new shipment arrives.

- ADS AND GARAGE SALES -- Keep an eye on the newspaper. When people move, they often choose to liquidate their own home offices and start over with new furniture.

- DISCARDS -- Look around your house. I have seen everything from card tables to steamer trunks to old doors used quite successfully as office furniture.

- CLOSEOUTS -- When you read about a business closing or moving or merging, pick up the phone. They may find it easier and more economical to replace their old furniture rather than move it.

- FURNITURE LEASING COMPANIES -- You can find great bargains on previously leased furniture. Just look for good quality companies and inspect each piece carefully for damage.

Remember that the first rule of space design is to be creative! Good luck and have fun putting your home office together.

You must include the following resource box when publishing this article:

Ramona Creel is a Professional Organizer and the founder of OnlineOrganizing.com -- a web-based one-stop shop offering everything that you need to get organized at home or at work. At OnlineOrganizing.com, you may get a referral to an organizer near you, shop for the latest organizing products, get tons of free tips, and even learn how to become a professional organizer or build your existing organizing business. And if you would like to read more articles about organizing your life or building your business, get a free subscription to the "Get Organized" and "Organized For A Living" newsletters. Please visit <http://www.onlineorganizing.com> or contact Ramona directly at <mailto:ramona@onlineorganizing.com> for more information.

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