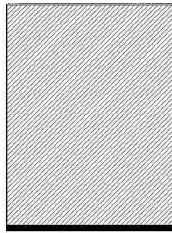


25 TIPS

to help you run your office more efficiently

by Mark Rowh

For two-and-a-half decades, *OfficeSOLUTIONS* has focused on ways to make offices more efficient, covering everything from using emerging technologies better to wiser management of the workers who are vital to your business' success. In that spirit, and in recognition of our 25th anniversary, here are 25 tips for enhancing the efficiency of your office operations.



1. Provide collaborative workspaces.

"It's always beneficial to provide workers with a space to brainstorm and work together on projects," says Betsy Hoyer, advertising and public relations manager for The HON Company. "The quality and quantity of work completed by your employees are bound to increase." She notes that if you don't have room to add a shared workspace within your current office, an alternative is having employees work within the same area for increased efficiency.

2. Find the right equipment mix.

"Ensure that the mix of products being used throughout the office is optimized," says Joseph Contreras, director, product and solutions marketing for Toshiba. "Users tend to print to the product that is in closest proximity to them or their desktop printer. This may not always be the most efficient or cost-effective." He advises conducting studies to determine which equipment is needed and where it would best be located.

3. Focus on time management.

To limit wasted time throughout the office, send staff to time management seminars. Or, hold your own internal sessions and bring in a guest expert. One helpful resource is *Take Back Your Life: Using Microsoft Office Outlook 2007 to Get Organized and Stay Organized*, by Sally McGhee (Microsoft Press).

4. Try organizational software.

"Stop wasting time looking for information," says Kathleen Alessandro, president of Energized Solutions in Dearborn, Mich. She recommends programs such as the Paper Tiger, Google Desktop Search, and EasyReach to keep track of documents, retrieve files, and locate key information.

5. Check out energy ratings.

When purchasing new equipment—from printers to lighting—compare energy ratings. It's surprising how much energy you can save over a year's time with energy-efficient equipment. Check the government's site, www.energystar.gov, for information on energy ratings.

6. Make better use of meetings.

Hold regular meetings to communicate

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progress, address areas of difficulty, and make sure staff members understand each other's roles. To avoid wasting time in the process, prepare adequately in advance. "Use agendas for meetings," says Dennis Kilian, vice president of Safari Books Online. "And send them out in advance, with all supporting documentation, prior to the meeting."

7. Provide coaching for employees.

Part of your own inefficiency can sometimes be precipitated by the inefficiencies of others, according to Jane Creswell, author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Coaching for Excellence*. "Coaching is a process that can help you bring out the best in your co-workers so that they are more efficient and, therefore, you can be more focused and efficient in your own job," she says.

8. Consider open spacing.

"We believe in the open-office concept, which means that no one has walls and everyone works together in large rooms with many desks," says Joe Noonan, office category manager for CSNOfficeFurniture.com (www.CSNOfficeFurniture.com) in Boston. "This kind of environment naturally creates cleaner desks as people want to please co-workers by being organized and uncluttered. Sure, there are a few exceptions, but this is generally the rule."

9. For scheduling, use Microsoft Exchange.

This tool is a winner in streamlining office operations, according to Diana Rohini LaVigne, head of the global communications division of Nair and Company in Sunnyvale, Calif. "It helps us expedite setting up phone meetings, video conferences, and other meetings," she says. "We don't have any back-and-forth e-mails with several people asking us to suggest a few time slots when they are available. One

person is in charge of checking for an opening, and then an e-mail goes out suggesting that time and a backup time. It is simple and easy to implement."

10. Share knowledge.

It always helps to share your knowledge openly with other co-workers, notes Dennis Kilian of Safari Books Online. "They will learn some new tips, and they may share a few with you," he says. "Not sharing your knowledge isn't job preservation—it creates an environment of hostility and poor morale."

11. Get a label printer.

"A label printer lets you print labels out individually as needed so you're not wasting a whole sheet of laser labels to print a handful," says Sheila Gartland, marketing director at Garvey's

Office Products in Niles, Ill. "It also prevents the problem of someone trying to print labels on a shared laser printer when someone else sends a print job at the same time," she notes.

12. Get rid of clutter. "When clutter takes over, productivity can be greatly affected," says Wendy Kaufman, CEO of Balancing Life's Issues in Ossining, N.Y. "De-clutter your desk, e-mail inbox, and file cabinet. Whatever you don't need, get rid of!" A helpful resource: *The Office Clutter Cure*, by Don Aslett (Marsh Creek Press).

13. Switch to Internet fax. "Fax machines are one of the most energy-intensive pieces of equipment in a typical office," says Steve Adams, vice president of marketing for Protus. "They are constantly drawing power around the clock because they need to be available at any hour to send or receive a fax." To avoid waste, he recommends Internet fax services, which allow you to send and receive faxes via computer, either through regular e-mail accounts or a secure online server.

14. Engage a professional organizer. "If you're struggling to create more efficient systems in your office for the day-to-day work, hire a professional organizer," says Cara Brook, owner of Strategize, Organize, Simplify LLC in Stamford, Conn. This expert can work with you over an extended time or put together a plan of action that you can implement yourself. The National Association of Professional Organizers (www.napo.net) lists qualified pros in your region.

15. Promote ergonomic computing. Steps to prevent worker fatigue and

repetitive motion injuries while using computers are no-brainers. Acquiring the right furniture, peripherals, and accessories can be well worth the minimum expense. Just one example is the Microsoft Natural Ergonomic Keyboard 4000, available from vendors such as CableOrganizer.com (www.cableorganizer.com), which allows workers' wrists to be placed in a more natu-

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ral alignment. Adjustable monitor arms, wrist rests, and other products also promote healthy ergonomics.

16. Encourage breaks. Derek Timm, a spokesman for Workrite Ergonomics in Petaluma, Calif., says that along with using well-designed products from a comfort and safety angle, it's important to make sure workers avoid strained, uncomfortable static positions for extended periods of time. He encourages eye breaks (looking away from computer screens to change focal distance every 15 minutes) and micro breaks (brief two-minute breaks every 30 to 60 minutes to stand, stretch, or move around).

17. Maximize storage space. Find space that's not being used, such as shelves, wall space, and inside cabinet doors, suggests Allan Young, CEO ShelfGenie in Marietta,

Ga. Products such as his company's custom Glide-Out Shelves provide two or more shelves in each cabinet when most standard cabinets only provide one and a half. Carefully placed shelves and wall-mounted organizers offer similar advantages.

18. Integrate communications. Look into emerging trends such as unified communications, or UC. This involves creating a common inbox for e-mail, voice mail, advanced IP telephony, conferencing, and other communications. "The ability to combine all, or even some, of these features into our daily workflow helps tremendously," says Chalan Aras, vice president of marketing, voice communications solutions for Polycom in San Jose, Calif. And by doing so, you limit phone tag as co-workers stay more aware of each other's activities.

19. Use a file cart. Professional organizer Cara Brook recommends using a mobile file cart for temporary storage of papers you're not ready to file. "The file cart allows people to file papers away while they're still able to visually see them as reminders of what needs to be worked on. It keeps the desk clear at the same time and can slide under the desk at the end of the day."

20. Go electronic. "Utilize new technologies to integrate paper-based information into electronic processes," advises Bill Brikiatis, director of corporate marketing at eCopy in Nashua, N.H. "They can increase efficiency and eliminate costs associated with sending and storing paper documents."

21. Invest in multifunction printers. "Devices that print, copy, scan, and fax are a great resource to increase efficiency in

the office,” says Leah Quesada, director of product marketing for Xerox Office Group in Rochester, N.Y. “They help workers spend less time handling documents and managing information.” She points out that some MFPs are powered by a unique controller that supports multitasking, such as allowing one user to scan documents while the system prints a separate job for another worker.

22. Employ energy-efficient surge protectors or power strips.

Updated models include features such as remote controls and motion detector shut-offs. “These new devices allow users to make sure that their equipment is not using phantom power or using power when it is unnecessary,” says Daniel Sitarz, director of the Center for Sustainable Business and Technology in Carbondale, Ill.


23. Limit Internet abuse. Implementing Internet surf controls is a step any office can take, according to Lisa Imler, vice president of Today’s Office Professionals, a division of Spherion Corp. While draconian policies in this area may be morale busters, reasonable efforts can both reduce wasted staff time and limit exposure to questionable Websites. One example of Internet monitoring software is Spector CNE Investigator

(www.spectorcne.com). If you don’t want to go to this extreme, creating clearly understood policies that limit personal Internet use during work hours can be worthwhile.

24. Provide adequate personal space.

“Always be on the lookout for ways to enhance personal organization in your office’s private spaces,” says the HON Company’s Betsy Hoyer. She notes that while it’s great to have teams work together, each worker needs to find ways to be efficient within his space. “Talk to your employees to find out what products or tactics will work best to keep them on track,” she says.

25. Focus on the human factor.

Even as technology continues to advance and we become more automated, the best way to improve efficiency is through our employees, according to Imler of Today’s Office Professionals. “Review your current performance management process, and ensure it clearly communicates company goals, manages performance, and compensates fairly,” she says. “If you can increase the efficiency of your staff, you will improve the productivity in your office.” 

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