

How to be better organised

You might be only filing bills at home but, if you're organised, you could also be saving money. **Emma Portelli** tells you how

Whether it's a warranty card, a university assignment or a client's file, if you can't find what you're looking for at home the consequences may be more costly than you think. On average, people spend five days a year looking for misplaced belongings and, according to Adele Blair, professional organiser and founder of Blair Lifestyle Management, losing things can eat into the household or home business budgets. Unclaimed medical costs, late fees from an unpaid, misplaced bill and expired gift vouchers are the most common ways that disorganisation can add unexpected costs. When it comes to running a business from the home, the costs can be more serious. "If a business person spends an hour looking for something because he or she is not organised it's an hour they can't charge to a client, but if it takes them two minutes it hasn't cost them a cent," Blair says. "If a client comes into your home and it's a disorganised mess it can give a bad impression and you can lose work because of perception."

Before she became a professional organiser full-time, Blair spent 20 years as an administration manager and has organised every corporate office she's worked in. Since she started her own business nearly three years ago, she has

come across a number of people trying to run a business or complete their studies at the dining room table or on the lounge, which she says takes an emotional toll on the family. Having the workspace in a common room means the door can never close on the work and stops the transition to normal family life. "If the family wants to sit down and have a meal together but is unable to because you're in the middle of your work and can't pack it up, it causes friction. There's nowhere for the family to be a family," Blair explains.

According to Blair the most common problem her clients have is dealing with the continuous influx of paper. "One client's entire home office was drowning in paper so they moved into the dining room, which also ended up covered in paper. They called me in when they'd started to take over the lounge room," she says. Taking on the paperwork is always her first step in organising a home office. She keeps home and business files separate and says the trick to organisation is to create a system and stick to it. For example, an electricity bill could be filed under 'O' for Origin, 'E' for electricity, 'U' for utilities or 'H' for household. Pick the one that



Streamlined storage and work space by Ikea

makes the most sense to you and then do the same thing for all the paperwork – if you went with 'E' for electricity, then file the rates bill under 'R', and insurance premiums under 'I'.

Blair's philosophy is to keep only what you need for as long as you need to keep it. According to the Australian Tax Office, records and receipts for work expenses need to be kept for five years for personal claims over \$300, and it's the same timeframe for small business records. Blair keeps receipts for personal purchases over \$100 and, for electrical items, she staples the receipt, warranty information



Simple solutions from Officeworks

and user manual together and files them in a separate expanding file. Then, if an electrical item breaks down, the paperwork is in one spot and easy to find.

Storing like with like is one of Blair's basic tips to organisation. By filing all the user manuals in one place, shelving reference books together, putting stationery in one spot and storing client files in the same drawer, you only have to go to one place to find anything you need.

Often the home office is in a room intended as a bedroom so it may have a wardrobe, with limited space for a desk, bookcase and filing cabinets. Blair works around this by fitting out wardrobes with wire shelving units and drawers for storage but says there are other solutions if you don't want to go to the expense. "Canvas hanging bags normally used to

store shoes is a good place to keep stationery and if the wardrobe already has shelves, they're often the right height for lever arch folders, which can be used instead of filing cabinets," Blair says. Home office furniture systems such as elfa, which is available at Howards Storage World, can be customised to suit any space and are easy to assemble. The system allows the desk, shelves and drawers to be adjusted to any height and configuration to maximise work and storage space for even a small room.

When it comes to desk space, Blair says many people try to work on too small a surface. A laptop on the coffee table might be fine to check emails, but if there's any serious work to be done more room is needed. For the space constrained, Ikea has a range of fold out desks that provide a handy work surface that closes up into a neat storage cupboard with space for the laptop and folders. When it comes to bigger desks, Blair advises to prioritise



Nifty space savers include clockwise from left: Ikea's PS laptop workstation and Estetisk storage compartment; kikki-K's Kraft desk boxes; and drawer organisers from Howards Storage World

what is put on the surface. She has her computer on one side, a file rack with her current work on the other and a clear space that's big enough to open up a file and take notes. There are no drawers under her desk so she can roll from one side to another, similar to the trestle-style desk available at Officeworks. She also advises using a magazine box for an in-tray. "There's only so much paper you can fit in a magazine box and when it's full you're forced to go through it," she says.

Stationery certainly has a spot on the desk but it's important to keep it neat and together. Australian-based retailer kikki-K specialises in stylish desk organisers to help keep everything in its place. Eliminate clutter from the desktop with storage containers that can be hung on the wall above the desk (Ikea has just the thing) or Steve Wilson, manager of Howards Storage World at Mount Gravatt, suggests taking stationery off the



Customised elfa shelf system from Howards Storage World

desk completely and putting it into the drawer and keeping it tidy with drawer inserts – ones that are designed for ties and underwears are ideal for separating stationery.

Staying organised can be a challenge, but Blair's advice is to do a little bit often. Allocate one task each day, for example, on Monday deal with bills, then Tuesday enter contacts into your database and either file the business cards or throw out the loose bits of paper and so on. "Otherwise you'll end up spending three days doing these things rather than half an hour each day and that's three days you can't charge to your client or spend with your family," she says.

Stockists: Blair Lifestyle Management 1300 558 643, Howards Storage World 02-9452 8888, Ikea 3380 6800, kikki-K 03-9645 6346, Officeworks 1300 633 423.