**The Benefits of a Digital Declutter**

Just like cleaning house regularly, cleaning up your digital house regularly makes life easier and more pleasant.

Doing a digital declutter frees up mental space. It’s amazing how much difference a clear working space makes. The less clutter your brain has to sort through to start productive work, the more efficient and flowing your work can be.

Also, the more organised your digital files are, the less time you spend searching for things you need. It will help you to focus more easily and not get distracted from unnecessary clutter hijacking your attention.

**There are several categories of clutter:**

* The clutter you hope to get to ‘one day’. If you haven’t got to it within a week (or whatever timeframe you feel is reasonable), delete it and move on.
* The clutter that should not even be on your device or has lived on your desktop forever because you don’t know where to file it. Either give it a home or delete it. Accidental downloads or apps you have tried and rejected are in this category.
* The clutter that 'might be important' one day. What is a reasonable time frame to hold on to stuff 'just in case'? Whatever your time frame is, get rid of it if it’s stepped over that boundary.
* The clutter that is outdated. Client files that are ten years old are in this category! You don’t need to keep it ‘just in case’. Keep client files for the statutory period, and only keep files longer than that if they are still relevant to the business.

Assessing what kind of clutter you are dealing with might make clearing it easier. If you have a lot of clutter to clear, first create folders for the above categories, and move it into the relevant folders. You can then easily move documents between these folders if you need to think about them. Then, once you have everything organised, tackle each folder in turn.

**Easy Steps to Decluttering**

1. How long are you keeping client-related documents? Remember, just because you can keep everything forever on your computer doesn't mean you have to. In the \*old days\* we would have an annual clear-out of paper files after we had kept them for the statutory period. So do the same with digital files and delete records for financial years you no longer need.
2. Archive client folders that are no longer active.
3. Keep your desktop clear. Or, at the very least, keep it only for active and current documents. Get rid of shortcuts unless you actually use them regularly.
4. Unsubscribe from emails you no longer read – you can always subscribe again if you miss them cluttering up your inbox! Be ruthless – do you read it? Is it necessary for your professional development or currency of knowledge?
5. Sync your calendars if you use more than one. For example, you can link personal and work calendars, or if you have access to client domains you can sync their calendar to your own work calendar so you can see at a glance all your commitments. Stop wasting time looking at two or three different calendars before making appointments.
6. Clear up your downloads folder. If you have saved documents to their client-related folder, there is no need for the same document in the downloads folder. Delete everything you have saved and move the things you haven't. Better yet, update your browser preferences or settings so that you always instruct your computer where to save documents so they don’t end up in the downloads folder by default, and you don’t have to decide later where to move them to.
7. Keep your work and personal digital files separate. Organise your personal and work items into two separate folders on your desktop. Or consider having separate logins for personal and work user access. Or if you can afford it, have separate computers for work and personal use.
8. Reduce social media links – unfollow organisations or people who are no longer essential to your work.
9. Clear out your browser cache from time to time. You probably have to do this anyway as it seems to solve many web browser issues, but it’s good practice to do it monthly anyway.
10. Remove browser extensions you no longer use. They slow down your browser experience, so only keep the ones you use.
11. Delete apps you no longer use or only use infrequently. You can always download it again when you really need it, and your account data will remain.
12. Turn off all but essential notifications. Are you compulsively checking your phone with every notification? Try turning off all notifications on the weekends. Experiment with what notifications you actually need to act on and remove the others.
13. Use filters in your email inbox – for emails you want to read later but aren't urgent, send them to a separate folder that you can focus on reading at a convenient time. Only allow client and essential work-related emails directly into your inbox.
14. Set a reminder to declutter again every quarter!

**The Benefits of a Digital Declutter**

Clearing out your digital files and workspace reduces stress, frustration and procrastination, speeds up your device, boosts productivity, improves focus and attention, helps you to prioritise, and makes more mental and emotional energy available for the tasks you choose to focus on.