

[Jump to Navigation](#) | [Jump to Content](#)

Popular Threads on Solosez

Furniture/Office Organization

People organize themselves and their projects differently. I read in some organizational book that you should keep your desk clear and get out whatever file you're working on. That drives me crazy. I'm a "stacker." I put my projects in stacks on my desk so that, when I move from one project to another, all I have to do is put down one stack and pick up another. This might sound crazy but it works for me.

I should say it works for me but for one little problem: At any given time I'm working on a half-dozen or so projects at once. So I run out of desk room. Everything gets stacked on top of some other project such that I'm left with a mess.

So I am soliciting suggestions for an office layout. I work a considerable amount of the time from home, where I have a corner desk with a computer monitor in the corner. I'm thinking about setting up a table to one side of the desk so I can swivel around to exchange stacks (plus also put a second computer on the table for when I'm working on more than one thing that requires a computer). Another alternative is a round desk, but that seems to me like it would waste space. I suppose I could get another corner desk and put it behind me so I work in sort of a box.

If you work the way I do - the "stacker" system - and have some input on how to get the necessary surface space, I'd sure like to hear your thoughts.

BTW, although I store lots of stuff in the computer or online, I can't do the true "paperless" thing. I need to see several things at once on a given project plus moving things around helps me, too. Monitors just can't do that.

JV

Jimmy Verner
Dallas, Texas

I do the same thing. Periodically try to organize myself better, and sometimes I try using those wire thingies that make everything stand up, but

I always end up going back to my stacks. Sometimes stacks on top of stacks. Amazingly, as long as no one else moves anything, I can normally find what I am looking for, up to the point when I need to reorganize all the piles and start over. Since I have been doing this for some 30 years now, it may be too late to teach this old dog new tricks, but if anyone has a suggestion, I am certainly willing to hear it as well.

Lisa



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“You should never try to teach a pig to sing: it can't be done, and it annoys the pig.” Robertson v. White, 633 F.Supp. 954 (W.D.Ark. 1986).

I too am a stacker, but after 25 years have gotten much better at it - because we went paperless.

The process started about three years ago, and it is terrific. My desk is clear most of the time, and as my assistant gets better at scanning incoming mail (yes, we scan virtually all incoming mail), it is getting even better.

Your stacks become folders on your computer. It takes a bit of getting used to, reading documents on the computer rather than paper, but just like you know which stack has the document you are looking for, you know which folder on the computer has the document.

As to screen real estate, you MUST get two monitors. The subject is not even up for debate. Get two monitors.

In reality, get three. I am at two now for about a year, and need a third. You will not believe how much more organized and productive you are!

Mark
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I already ha

ve two monitors. I still would rather read and analyze materials on paper, and do basic organizational editing on paper, even if I turn to the computer to do the actual/final editing. It's easier to comprehend, and to have a number of spots in the same document open at the same time. Call me a dinosaur if you will ... :-)

Lisa
Lisa A. Runquist

Aw come on. Research in one window, Word in the other. Cut and paste between the two.

It would be heaven if I could have firefox and outlook in a third!

Reading docs on the screen is no longer the problem. Reading discovery is the new issue, which after two years I still don't have the hang of.

Yes, we scan all discovery documents, incoming and outgoing. And bate stamp on the computer too.

Quite amazing. When I started practicing, there were no computers, certainly no computer networks, no faxes, no PDFs, no email, and Fedex was a figment of someone's imagination.

Heck, Windows didn't exist. And after I was in practice for 5 years we got our first PC, Windows still didn't exist, and you couldn't network PCs (which were dual floppies, no hard drives. We eventually upgraded to 10 MB hard drives! Back then, only sissies used a mouse, real men used the keyboard, and didn't need a graphics interface.

I remember when online services didn't have a graphics interface. You dialed in, and got the equivalent of a C prompt!

Long live Compuserve!

Mark

Jimmy -

Projects which MUST be addressed today go on the floor to the side of my chair and in the path leading to the door. In order to avoid the I must climb over them. It keeps them in my sight. If the floor is clear at the end of the day, I go home. If the floor is not clear, then it must not be the end of the day.....yet!

I prefer a cockpit design with a curved work area and accessory items (phone, printer, reference materials, etc.) behind or to the far sides. It's nice to sit in the middle of a work area and simply turn your chair to get to the items you need promptly.

As you noted, paperless is nice, but us old folks still like to handle the papyrus and annotate with pencil or ink when you've got to traipse through a set of multi-part documents.

As you noted, paperless is nice, but us old folks still like to handle the papyrus and annotate with pencil or ink when you've got to traipse through a set of multi-part documents.

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1. My name is Chris and I'm a stacker:

It feels good to talk about this, and it's great to hear I'm not the only one. As the day goes on, I begin to build stacks around myself. Some with stickies like "file", "mail", "update". I tend to be unable to work on only one file at a time, and I like to have everything I need at my fingertips. By the end of the day, everything gets worked through and put away (usually).

2. Paperless a function of age - or - perhaps something else?

On this thread and others, people often repeat the sentiment "I'm just old fashioned to go paperless" or "I'm a dinosaur" and making comments poking fun at the primitive nature of paper or ink.

I am in my 20s and can't imagine going paperless. It's not because I'm afraid of technology or because I'm too old to learn new tricks, and that got me thinking... what if paper v. paperless isn't about "modern" v. "old-fashioned" or "tech-savvy" v. "out-dated". What if different personality types or different learning styles are at play?

I honestly get incredibly fatigued staring at a monitor all day. I don't even proofread on my monitor. I like to print drafts out and manipulate them and work them with a pen. It may have to do with learning styles or personality. I'm very tactile, and I like (need) to touch paper, files, and books. When I am proofreading or reviewing something I need to strike out, circle, make notes in the margin, and move around the document with my eyes and my hands. I perceive things in space, in order, and in their relation to one another. A file on a computer doesn't really "exist" to me.

Is this totally weird? I'm just thinking out loud. I'd be interested in other's thoughts.

Chris

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I'm a stacker, too, but I'm a floor stacker. My desk isn't large enough to stack all my files and I like to work with one stack at a time on my desk. This is especially true of all my personal injury files. That way nothing gets placed in the wrong file as I file as I complete the work. When a client comes in we meet in the conference room so they never see my stacks. I also print out and edit with a pen; the old-fashioned way. However, I'm getting better at editing on the computer.

Just my \$.02.

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I did buy some clear plastic storage boxes - they are a little bigger than letter-size, about four inches deep, and have snap-on lids. I label them with masking tape and a marker. That helped some because you can read/see what's in them and readily move them around, plus if they fall over usually they stay snapped shut. I try to keep them stacked on a bookshelf.

The multiple monitor thing tempts me. I read an article the other day about how much more efficient it is to work with a large monitor so that you can read two pieces of paper at once. So I increased the resolution and the font size on my 20" screen and now can do that. I've been thinking about buying a really large monitor - Apple (I use Macs) makes a 30" display that I covet (but I don't covet it \$1,800 worth).

Do you use one computer to run both monitors so that your mouse runs across both? Can you do that with three monitors? At some point would this slow down the computer?

I have an old CRT monitor I'm not using for anything that's pretty big. Maybe I'll try hooking that up to see how the multiple monitor thing works.

Thx

JV

The two monitors run off of one computer. The computer needs to have two video cards, one card with two ports, which is what I have. The mouse runs across both monitors, you can cut and paste between the two, it is actually no different than having two windows open on one monitor.

Three would work the same way. I don't think there is any significant performance issue, since it is the number of windows that are open and processes running that will affect performance, not the number of screens.

Of course, with two monitors there is a greater temptation to have more windows open, and I would imagine even a greater temptation with three monitors.

Give it a try, I don't know anyone who has tried two monitors and who decided to go back to one.

Mark

Chris,

You are definitely on to something here. My highest hurdle when trapped by the flat textual leg irons of law as a real property lawyer is that I perceive and learn very well spatially. Land, water, and construction are very spatial in nature, and I too do not "get it" well when I am trapped by a flat computer screen. I like the paper and my good old shelf of books. It is not difficult to transform a spatial view of, for example, an easement on real property, into text, but since a picture tells a thousand words, I lament the law's oppressive adherence to primarily textual forms of communication. Beyond the occasional map or courtroom exhibit, I will have a hard time going paperless, even though the last of the five lumber mills in Coeur d'Alene closed yesterday, after over 100 years of milling operations in town.

When the lights go out and the last hard drive fails, I will curl up with my paper and remain happy as a clam.

Best regards,
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You are not weird -- I feel re "paperless" the same way and I am in my mid 30s. I think you are right and it is simply a matter of a personal preference and/or working style.

I'd like to be able to have everything in electronic form so I could work anywhere from my laptop but I would do so only if it is absolutely necessary. I still prefer reading documents and doing edits on paper because my mind works better this way and, if I had to do it exclusively on a computer screen, it would be killing my eyes and making me dizzy rather quickly.

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Art,

I, too, think visually and in multiple dimensions. On the other hand, as a litigator, I have to have voluminous files easily accessible and transportable. My personal compromise: When I am working on a project in the office, I print "working copies" of all the documents I need to refer to all at the same time (stamped as such) that go in a "project folder". When finish the project, the end result gets scanned to PDF via document management software, and the paper folder/contents shredded. I use a similar system of temporary hearing or trial notebooks for key documents and indices to everything else when in court. Kind of gives me the best of both worlds.

FWIW...

Alan

Me too, although I find myself more and more foregoing physical editing because why write it out in longhand and then copy on the keyboard? I bought a speech-to-text program recently that might help with this, but I haven't had time yet to play with it.

I still think that a finished product must be done neatly and be pleasing to the eye. So I always print out whatever I'm working on for a final look-see.

JV

Jimmy Verner
Dallas, Texas
<http://vernerbrumley.com>

I think this cockpit idea is what I'm looking for. So do you have a round desk? What's your setup? (Hint: A picture is worth a thousand words! Would you be willing to post one somewhere?)

Thx.

JV

One of the reasons I got a tablet PC was that I need to be able to mark up documents by hand and hold something in my lap rather than staring at a monitor on a desk all day, but at the same time, I wanted to be as paperless as possible. Office 2007 adds the ability to use "ink" in Word documents and Outlook simply by writing with the stylus, just like on paper. With the addition of PDF Annotator, I can also write directly on pdfs, highlight them, etc., just like paper, in a way that is far more intuitive and natural

than Adobe's extremely clunky annotation tools. I still print documents sometimes - I too seem to spot typos and the like much better when I'm looking at paper, and there are times when it is just easier to be able to flip back and forth between pages of a document and scrolling doesn't cut it. But the tablet PC has definitely been a worthwhile investment that's allowed me to accommodate my paper-loving side with my paper-hating side.

Worth thinking about if you want to go paperless but like to mark things up by hand or don't want to stare at a monitor on a desk all day.

Mitch

I don't mind staring at the monitor all day, but my eyes seem to be giving out.

Once I go cross-eyed I'll apply for disability.

In the meantime, maybe I'll try your idea. I, too, think Adobe is clunky.

But I still like paper. I used to write with a fountain pen. No more.

Thx

JV

Um -- why not? I still use a fountain pen regularly. I like fountain pens!

Lisa the dinosaur

OK, Mark, I'm going to give it a shot. We have begun scanning many of our documents anyway and I have a website where I can set up password protected client files where I can keep pleadings, documents, discovery, etc. (I won't upload any sensitive client info - I am a divorce lawyer you know - the really sensitive stuff I don't even write down on paper! But I digress).

I have a 20" iMac. I have just ordered two 22" monitors to go along with it. I have confirmed with a company called Matrox Graphics that their whiz-bang TripleHead2Go Digital Edition will work on a Mac and will result in a TRIPLE display with resolution of maximum 1280 x 1024 per display which ought to work out OK what with my tired old eyes. BTW, by buying refurbished monitors from tigerdirect.com and searching for the best price for the TripleHead gizmo, this entire project is going to cost me right at \$800, including cables for the two monitors plus a USB hub I've been needing to buy anyway. That will be a steal if it works as advertised.

The part about scanning documents and then looking at them on a monitor is what sold me. I hate to scramble around on my desk looking for a document that I just had out a moment ago but which I need to refer to again. I'll try doing my work on one screen, having documents on another

screen and (like you say) do research or have another document on the third screen. Another thing that I think will help me is OS X's Expose and Spaces features, which I really haven't used yet. Expose allows you to "store" four open windows at the corners of the screen and then click on whichever one you want to see. Spaces does something similar although I'm not exactly sure how it works. So maybe I can have up to eight windows open on two monitors while I work off a third monitor.

One final - but very low-tech - thing I might try is to string a line a little bit above the monitors and use clothesline clips to hang documents off them. I know it'll look weird, but this is my home office and my wife already hates to come in because it looks so - shall we say - eclectic?

I'll give you all a report once it's up and running and let you know how it's working out.

Thx. to all for the input.

JV

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