

Spring Cleaning - Digital Decluttering - Part 1 – 5/27/2023

This is one of a series of articles provided by the Oakmont Technology Learning Center on the use of technology by seniors.

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Does the sheer volume of your files and photos seem daunting sometimes? When getting a new computer (or tablet or phone), decluttering on the old computer or device is a good idea to make the transition easier. Since new devices get purchased every 4-5 years, it doesn't hurt to plan ahead and make your life easier now. With existing computers, think about backing up, doing a purge, and reorganizing/cleaning up as well as changing bad habits about how you store files.

Why declutter? Just as it is with "things" in our households and garages, there are negative psychological effects of "too much" with our internet usage, social media, and storage of digital data "I might need someday". It's a daunting task, likely best done in short bursts by prioritizing what's most important to make your life easier. Start by doing a backup, then purging the oldest "stuff", then look at the following topics:

Files. Name files with something logical (date, place, topic, who, club, etc). Know how to search by file name or file content on your computer. Create folders and subfolders by topic. Consider creating "cloud" folders in the same architecture. Know how to search for files on your computer and in your cloud files. Clean out space-wasting documents you no longer need. Keep a backup somewhere other than your house, given our experiences with wildfires here in Oakmont.

Downloads. How many of us have a bunch of files we've downloaded and then they live long term in a Downloads folder? Purge this folder when you're done with the files or move the files to your data folders/subfolders or to the cloud that you've created.

Email. As with files, create folders and subfolders with logical names (Club, Nextdoor, Facebook, House, Family, Sender, Topic, etc). Group by sender or topic and use subfolders. Consider using the same folder/subfolder architecture that you use for hard drive files. Learn how to use "rules" in your e-mail app to direct incoming e-mail to subfolders so they don't clog up your inbox. There's nothing worse psychologically than a huge e-mail inbox that looks like a "to-do" list.

Photos. Back up photos in case of emergencies and store them off-site and in the cloud. Scan in photo albums so they are stored in the cloud; this frees up space in your house taken up by dozens of "paper" photo albums. Organize photos into digital albums using an app (Apple or Google), store in the cloud, delete lousy photos. If photos are on your computer, name files in folders and subfolders with date/who/where.

Decluttering Part Two next month will cover apps, browsers, online retailers, social media, notifications, and more. For an electronic copy of this article and other articles, visit oakmont-learning.org under Tech Articles.