

The First 10 Steps To Declutter Your Data

Welcome to *The First Ten Steps to Declutter Your Data*. You're minutes away from your first actions to declutter your data and take charge of your digital life. I'm Angela Crocker, your digital decluttering guide. I help businesses communicate more effectively by organizing their information and creating a robust content plan.



After 25 years on the Internet I had an unwieldy amount of data. I was storing 40,000 hi-resolution photographs, thousands of work files, hundreds of presentations, dozens of partly written blog posts, about 450 social network accounts, 700 apps and, for some unknown reason, a raft of university essays leftover from my undergraduate days at Simon Fraser University. I had files stored on multiple hard drives, two mobile devices, several server back-ups and still more in the cloud on Dropbox, iCloud and Google Drive.

Sound familiar? Don't worry. You're not alone. Few individuals, and even fewer businesses, truly know what information they have available nor where to find it. I tackled my digital clutter and learned a lot along the way.



ANGELA CROCKER

Angela helps businesses communicate.

She's a writer, a teacher and an information organizer. Trained as both a business writer and a technical writer, Angela draws on her twenty years of business experience in marketing, fundraising, entrepreneurship, leadership and business communication. Since 2009, she's helped businesses figure out what content to share on websites, blogs and social media.

Through her company, Angela Crocker & Associates, Angela provides practical information and concrete action to support a wide range of business owners from solopreneurs to large-scale businesses. She's worked with world-class chefs, best-selling authors, award-winning musicians and thousands of entrepreneurs launching their business dreams. Angela was recognized as a finalist for the Self-Employment Entrepreneur of the Year Award in 2011.

An accomplished teacher, Angela has created and presented numerous college-level courses, custom workshops and one-on-one tutorials. In addition, she is a sought-after speaker for conference presentations and professional development events.

First published in 2011, Angela is author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Creating a Social Network* and co-author of *The B4 Plan: The Plan You Write Before You Start*. She is currently working on two new books *The Digital Cleanse* (September 2016) and *The Content Planner* (October 2016).

On a personal level, Angela researches vintage toys, collects Star Wars novels, adores choral music and doodles with fine art supplies. Connect with her at AngelaCrocker.com.

CONTENTS

Introduction

Step One: The App Diet

Step Two: Dedicated Devices

Step Three: Turn Off Notifications

Step Four: Your Email Inbox is an Eyesore

Step Five: Curate Your Photos (and Videos)

Step Six: Pick a Cloud

Step Seven: Schedule Tasks and Fun

Step Eight: Use the Idea City Method

Step Nine: Figure Out Your 3P

Step Ten: Establish Your Response Time

Copyright © Angela Crocker, 2016. V1.0

All rights reserved. This ebook is protected by the copyright laws of Canada. This ebook may not be copied or reprinted for commercial gain or profit. Additional downloads are available at AngelaCrocker.com. The use of short quotations in the context of reviews is permitted and encouraged. Occasional page copying for personal or group study is also permitted and encouraged.

This publication contains the opinions and ideas of the author. It is intended to provide helpful and informative material on the subject matter covered. It is published with the understanding that the author and publisher are not engaged in rendering professional services in the book.

The author and publisher specifically disclaim any responsibility for any liability, loss, or risk, personal or otherwise, which is incurred as a consequence, directly or indirectly, of the use and application of any of the contents of this book. Designed by Peggy Richardson of WestwardPress.com.

Angela Crocker & Associates
255 Newport Drive, Suite 225
Port Moody, BC V3H 5H1
Canada

www.AngelaCrocker.com

Are the **10** steps for you?

Yes! Almost everyone today has some degree of excess data. At home, that might just be an overflowing email inbox and a photo archive bursting at the seams. Add to that some social media accounts and I'm 99% sure you have digital clutter. Work situations are also filled with surplus data, adding to the volume of data for which you are responsible.

If you're interested in making better use of technology, sorting through your digital clutter and coming up with an organized and efficient way to access your data, then keep reading. The *Ten Steps* are definitely for you. Following my advice and putting these ideas into practice will reduce your digital clutter, make you more efficient, help you save time and give you a happier relationship with your information.

How the Ten Steps Work

The First Ten Steps to Declutter Your Data is designed to get you started on a digital cleanse. I've carefully selected ten steps to guide you through tasks necessary to move forward with your digital decluttering.

I suggest you do them in the order listed. I've tried to sequence them so you'll have some early success before the tougher, time-consuming tasks make it on to your to do list. That said, if you can't take action on a particular step today, feel free to move on to the next step, just remember to loop back to any skipped steps.

Once completed, your digital life will have moved away from chaos and closer to serene.

A Digital Cleanse

For more than two years, I embarked on a digital cleanse to sort out my data and my technology. Now, I'm ready to share the strategies and techniques I used to take control of my digital life. If you've got data overload, you need a digital cleanse, too. I'm ready and keen to help you.

Step 1:

THE APP DIET

The first milestone in digital decluttering is the App Diet. Don't delay. Grab your mobile phone (or your tablet) and do this now. Here's how to take control of your APP-etite.

Perks of a Leaner App Menu

I know. I know. I can hear your resistance. "But I might need that app" is a common refrain. Try the App Diet anyway. A deleted app can always be re-installed. Plus you'll enjoy some useful benefits:

- Save time with fewer screens or folders to swipe through.
- Free up some memory so you can take more pictures, download more music or keep your favourite e-books on your device.
- Reduce your data charges. So many apps work in the background, checking for updates or backing up data. Save some moola by slimming your data needs.
- Lessen the load on your processor. This is especially helpful if you have an older device. I've experience this first hand as my iPhone 4s struggles to keep up after 3+ years of service.
- Focus. With less clutter, you hone in on whatever you planned to do. Nobody needs the distractions.

How to Reduce Your APP-etite

First, swipe through all your screens and delete anything that's unfamiliar. Don't recognize that icon? If yes, odds are you haven't used the app recently.

Next, peruse your apps and delete the apps you rarely use. Travel apps are a great example. I love to fly with Westjet and they offer a handy app. Yet, I only fly 6 days a year. The other 359 days of the year I live without the app. I delete it after each trip and download it again, whenever needed.

Next, think about how you use your device. What apps do you really use? Be brutally honest and get rid of the ones that you no longer use to do tasks on your device. For a while there, I had nine photo editing apps. Yup, nine. Now, I just keep PS Express on my tablet for the occasional crop or rotate. Easy!

Next, consider the functions that can be done more efficiently on a computer. Delete them! Why waste time fumbling on a touch screen keyboard? I write much more efficiently on a full size keyboard with my dual monitors in front of me. A surplus of word processing apps were easy to delete. It's ok to keep one app per function for times when you are away from your computer.

Now, think about the time waster apps. Do you use your mobile or tablet as a productivity tool? Then delete the games. Conversely, if your device is all about relaxation then delete the work apps.

Lastly, protect your essential apps. What can't you live without? E-mail? Instagram? Facebook? Tiny Death Star? Make a mental note that these apps aren't going anywhere. And if you accidentally deleted something essential, take a moment and download it again now.

That's it. You're done. Great job! I'm proud of you.

Now, the real trick is to stay on this diet. So often, we're wooed by shiny, new apps. It's easy to click download. Resist the urge.



Finding New Apps to Love

On occasion, I'm giving you permission to go on an app binge. Visit the App Store or Google Play and go download crazy. Try a bunch of unfamiliar apps and find some new favourites. Just remember to delete all the apps that don't meet your expectations.

To streamline your digital life, you need dedicated devices. We're talking full-blown, long-term commitment. Decide which device does what. Then stick to it.

Divide Your Digital Activities

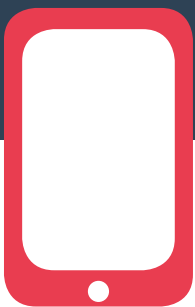
How you divide your digital activities will be a matter of personal preference. Your choices will be unique to your hardware and the content you create or consume. A dedicated device strategy creates patterns that focus your efforts.

Angela's Dedicated Devices

Here's how I dedicate my devices.

I use my mobile phone primarily for phone calls, text messages, photography and Instagram.

Step Two: Dedicated Devices



I use my tablet, an iPad, to write rough drafts, read Facebook, peruse Twitter, read e-books, listen to music and watch TV either from iTunes or on Netflix. I also use it to delete spam emails and read/reply to priority emails from a small group of carefully selected VIPs.

I use my desktop computer with its two monitors, full-size keyboard and ergonomic chair to read and reply to email, format and upload writing for the web, to organize and edit my photos, and for spreadsheet work and file management.

DEVICES WHEN YOU TRAVEL



My one exception is travel. I love to travel light. Carry-on only is ideal in this era of excess baggage fees and intense security screenings. With the right combination of apps, I can do 85% of my work and digital leisure on my iPad. I don't work as efficiently as usual, but it's a joy to travel with ease.

Go Analog to Decide

If you're struggling to decide how to use your devices, I suggest you go analog for a few minutes. Get out your sticky notes in two colours. Using one colour, make a sticky note for each of your soon-to-be dedicated devices. Mobile phone, tablet and computer will get you started. Don't forget your web enabled television, game console, fitness watch and other electronics.

Next, use the other colour of sticky notes. Make one note per digital task. Email. Photos. Instagram. Facebook. Twitter. Writing. Video games. TV. Movies. Music. E-books. And so on.

You've probably gathered by now that you simply match each digital task with a digital device. Likely, you'll need a test period before you finalize how you'll organize your dedicated devices.



Step 3: Turn Off Notifications

Turn off notifications for all of your mobile apps and desktop applications. They distract you from your current task, ruin your productivity and stress you out. Plus, a notification alert derails a task list in less than one second. Notifications drive many people crazy! Bing. Bing. Bing. Buzz. Buzz. Buzz. Frankly, in public, your notifications are as annoying as mine. So, turn them off. It's very freeing.

But I Need To Know What's Happening

You'll still see the flags, mentions or comment alerts in whatever tools you use. The difference is that you'll log in when you can to deal with them in a focused, organized and thoughtful way.

Check each app or application at the interval that makes sense for you. That might be twice a day, once a week or randomly when you have a few spare moments. If you're worried about response times, schedule regular, recurring "look at notifications" time in your appointment calendar.

I concede one exception to the notification rule: Kids.

The school's got to be able to reach you if your child is injured or ill. Or you may have some equally important reason you must be reachable. For example, stock market information if you're an investor, medical professionals if you are in their urgent care, or the security alarm system for your business. If you must be instantly reachable, then settle on one communication method with notifications turned on for urgent

How to Check Notifications Efficiently

During your notification time, do the following:

- Read to gather information communicated.
- Deal with the quick replies in the moment.
- Diarize any action items arising to act on them fully when you have time.
- If possible, archive or delete anything you won't need to see again.

Clustering your notification time improves your productivity, protects your daily task list and keeps stress at bay. Sounds good, right? Go turn off notifications now.

STEP 4:

YOUR EMAIL INBOX IS AN EYESORE

Confession time:

How many emails are in your inbox? Be honest. At least with yourself.

Today, I have 289 inbox items. That's on the high-side for me. I'm not too worried but I must admit it stresses me out a little. I won't let those messages hang around for long. By comparison, my husband has just 12 items and a friend (who wishes to remain anonymous) has more than 75,000. How does your inbox compare?

Too Many Emails

Email overload is a huge problem. And it's hard to control. Spam is a problem even with an excellent spam filter. Then there's any email you've subscribed, too. Plus all the group emails with the reply all overuse phenomenon. And the social media notification emails. Let alone the legitimate emails from individuals.

How to Tackle Your Inbox

To deal with the mess, I combined my own digital cleanse quest with strategies learned from Steve Dotto plus my interpretation of email bankruptcy. Each time I open my email I do the following things:

First, I delete spam. I don't pause to read anything legitimate. I'm on a mission to clear the junk mail that the spam filter missed.

Next, I look at messages from my VIPs. I've curated a list of twenty or so people that get top priority. Any message from them gets automatically filtered into my VIP inbox. Some are family (Hi, Dad!) or family related (my son's school) while others are people I collaborate with frequently - active clients, mentors, instructors, etc.

I read each VIP email to absorb the information in it. Then, I take action similar to how I handle notifications, if necessary. This might mean a quick instant reply. For more in-depth answers, I schedule time to reply fully. Lastly, I delete or archive each email. (We'll talk more about how to archive later in this step.)

Next, I look for anything I need to download and start the download. For me, that's usually new episodes of my favourite TV shows. Once the downloads are in progress, I delete the email.

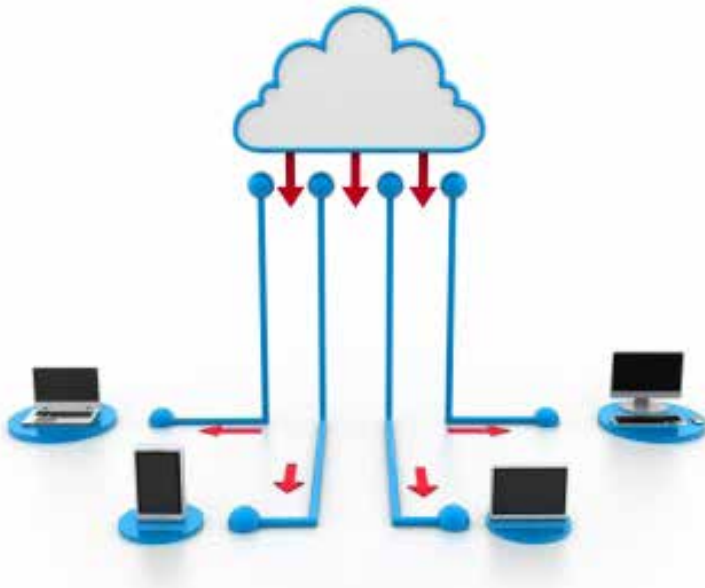
While my downloads are, um, downloading, I read any remaining emails from individuals using the same actions I use for my VIP messages. Read. Take action. Schedule action. Archive or delete.

Finally, time permitting, I read any email newsletters, social media notifications, Kickstarter updates or whatever else is leftover.

Schedule Time Daily for Email

As part my digital cleanse, I now deal with email during two or three set times each day. My first check usually happens while I enjoy my morning cup of tea. And then I check again after lunch. If I've got lots of "to read" messages leftover when I'm out of time during the work day, I'll add an evening email reading session, too. I'm also clear on my response times. This gives my work a healthy sense of urgency without a trace of panic. (We'll talk more about response times in Step Ten.)





Weekly Email Maintenance

I also do a bit of weekly email maintenance. I review my inbox for missed messages from VIP senders. I delete or archive anything I overlooked during the week. It's also a time to reflect on my current subscriptions. If I'm several issues behind on a particular email newsletter, I unsubscribe. I also look for email notifications from social networks. In general, I have turned off notifications but those sneaky programmers often turn on new ones that set to send by default.

One Big Archive

Steve Dotto introduced me to the notion of a single, searchable archive. Having used email regularly since 1993, I was in the old-school habit of creating nested folders for all my archived messages. As per Steve's advice, I now use a single folder to archive any email I need to keep. In two years, I've archived just 2,934 messages. It's amazing what you don't need to keep. And wonderfully easy when you can search that single archive, as needed.

Declare Email Bankruptcy

My next big step is to embrace the concept of email bankruptcy. I first learned this concept from Howard Jang, now Professor of Professional Practice at Simon Fraser University. While on vacation, Howard sets a friendly but firm out-of-office auto-reply. Something along the lines of "I'm on vacation until April 22. When I get back I'll be deleting all messages in my inbox. If you need to reach me, please resend your message on or after April 23." Brilliant!

I've also heard of people using January 1st as email bankruptcy day. They start the new year with an empty inbox. Friends and colleagues learn that anything unresolved from the previous year has to be resent if it's still relevant. So often it's no longer relevant! I haven't had the courage to do a full delete but I have done a couple trial runs by deleting the majority of messages from an overrun reply all thread. So far, I haven't missed anything important.

Create Your Own Email System

To make email work for you, you've got to have a system. You're welcome to use mine as a starting point. I encourage you to adapt it to your work style. It won't take long to turn your inbox from an eyesore to eye candy.

STEP 5

CURATE YOUR PHOTOS AND VIDEOS

More than ever, you need to curate your photos. It's easy to take thousands of photos a year.

How Many Photos Do You Need?

Think for a moment. Who needs 40,000 photos of their six year old? A generation ago, when film reigned, it was unusual and expensive for a family to take more than a few hundred photos a decade. Go back two generations and you'll find a couple dozen photos, at most, for a lifetime. Three generations back and their might be one or two images of each wealthy person.

So, back to our digital decluttering. How can you curate your photos? I recommend a two prong attack.

Best Practices for New Photos

Starting today, follow these best practices for new images:

- Review photos taken daily.
- Delete out of focus photos.
- Delete unflattering photos.
- Delete near-duplicate photos.

Best Practices for Old Photos

Schedule time to deal with your backlog of photos. You'll drive yourself crazy looking at thousands of photos at a time so narrow your approach for older photographs.

Pick:

- A particular date range – a week, month or year that makes sense to you.
- A specific event – a wedding, the birth of a child, a grand opening.
- A central person – yourself, the CEO, a grandchild, a celebrity.

Once you've selected a manageable batch of photos to review, apply the same best practices you use for your daily photographs:

- Review only today's batch of old photos.
- Delete out of focus photos.
- Delete unflattering photos.
- Delete near-duplicate photos.

About Unflattering Photos

Take care before you delete a photo on the grounds that it's unflattering. A goofy pose or crazy hair or an extreme fashion may all seem unflattering but please don't delete those moments. They are part of the subject's history and should be preserved.

And don't scrub a person from the archive because they don't like the way they look in photos. Body image is a big topic beyond digital decluttering. Please don't delete someone based on perception of looks. I've heard it all from mostly women in my life. Let your photo archive include the bulging tummies, scrawny arms, double chins, unexpected body hair and the like. Instead, define unflattering as photos that misrepresent the person. That might mean deleting Grandma's accidental middle finger salute if Grandma doesn't cuss.

Don't Forget Your Videos

The same strategies apply to curate your videos. Start today on new videos and plan time to review old videos until you are caught up. Lather, rinse, repeat.



Step 6

PICK A CLOUD



Cloud storage is an amazing invention! I love that I can access any of my files, any time, from anywhere. All I need is an Internet connection and a web browser (or a mobile app). I especially love that I can reliably work on the current version of my document no matter the hardware. Synchronized files are a joy. I also love that hardware failure no longer means a catastrophe. Yes, it's very sad when you shatter your phone but at least your data can be resurrected.

That said, I don't recommend my original ad hoc approach. With accounts on Dropbox, Google Drive and iCloud, I fractured my cloud storage across several platforms. Partly, I have a mixed bag because of the workflow preferences of the people and projects I've worked on. Maybe you can relate?

After a few years, it gets tricky to remember where to find the files you need. Nothing kills productivity like the frustration of searching for files across multiple platforms. It's been a painful experience. Truthfully, I'm still reorganizing my files onto one cloud. When you have 25 years of files to sift through it takes a lot of short sessions. I try not to do more than 30 minutes at a time for my sanity.

CLOUD STORAGE OPTIONS

Learn from my mistake and pick a cloud. Here are some of the available services and their rate packages:

Dropbox *
2 GB – free
1TB – CDN\$11.99 / month
Unlimited – CDN \$17.00 / user / month

iCloud *
5 GB – free
50 GB – CDN \$1.29 / month
200 GB – CDN \$3.99 / month
1 TB – CDN \$12.99 / month

Google Drive *
15GB – free
100 GB – US\$1.99 / month
1 TB – US\$9.99 / month
10 TB – US \$99.99 / month

* Rate packages noted were current in March 2016. Subject to change without notice.

Reasons for an Extra Cloud

I strongly recommend choosing a single cloud. Of course, if your client works via Dropbox and you work on Google Drive then you join your client on Dropbox. However, when the project is complete, archive a copy on your preferred cloud.

One last tip, if you keep accounts on more than one cloud storage service and have unused storage capacity, use that space as a backup location. For example, I keep a backup of our family photos, one of my most treasured possessions, on two clouds, just in case.

STEP 7: SCHEDULE TASKS AND FUN

Take time to schedule your digital activities. You get to decide when to use technology. In turn, this affirms when you're NOT going to use technology. You don't have to use it all the time. Frankly, a 24/7 digital life would be terrible for your physical and mental well-being and it can disrupt your sleep. It would be utterly boring. You've got to get out and live a little! Remember you are in charge of your digital life. You also get to choose when you're going to be offline, away from your computer and ignoring your smartphone.



Digital Tasks vs. Digital Fun

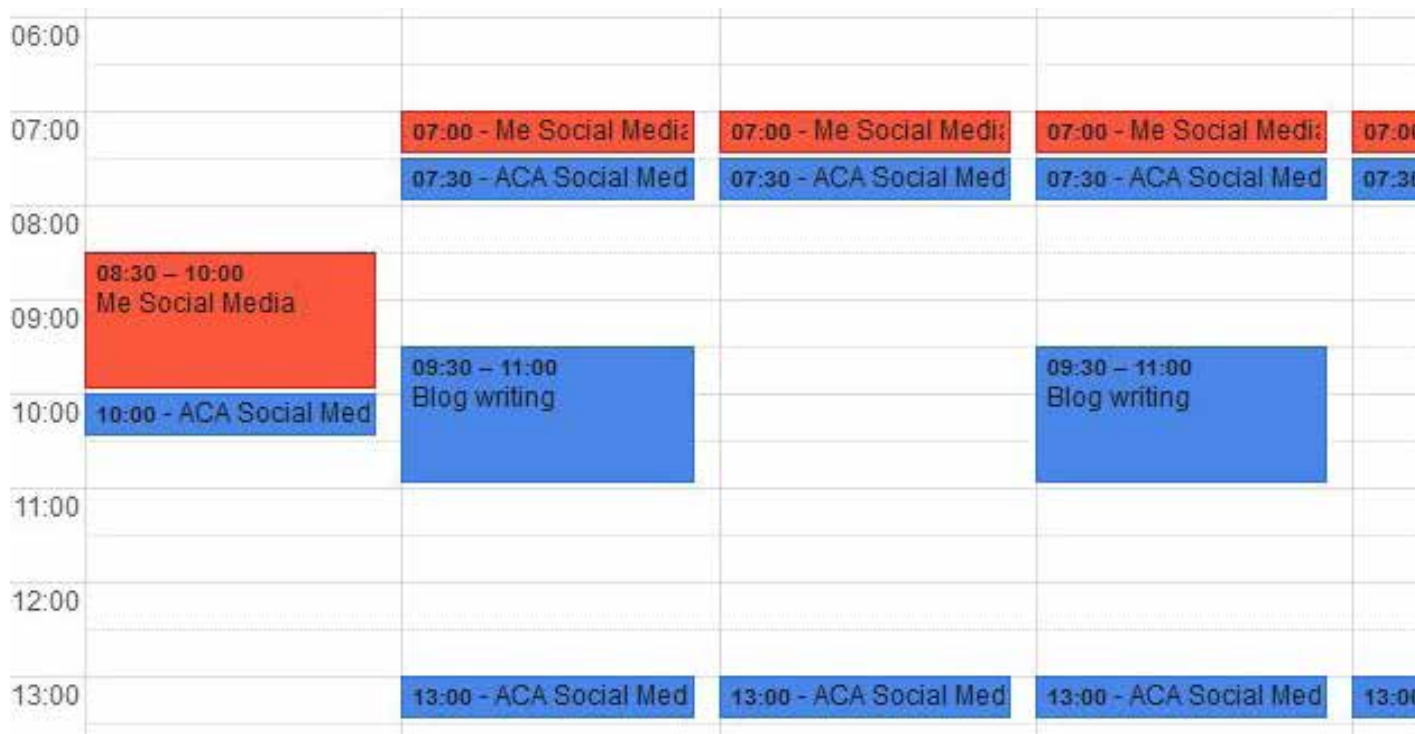
Digital Tasks vs. Digital Fun

I recommend you separate your digital tasks from digital fun. Digital tasks are things you do for work or your own projects. These might include writing blog posts, checking social media feeds, creating illustrations or editing copy. Digital fun includes all your leisure activities. Movie night, video games, Instagram and other social media outlets are all fun digital activities. Of course, for a movie reviewer watching movies is work not play. That's OK. You decide how to define the activities in your digital life.

Put your digital time in your calendar.

Here's a staged excerpt from my calendar. Events in blue are digital tasks related to my professional life. Orange events are digital snippets from my personal calendar.

My digital fun happens in early mornings, evenings and weekends. From Monday to Friday, I schedule my work related digital tasks, for the most part. What you can't see in this example is that I have flexibility to move my digital appointments around other events. For example, if I'm a parent volunteer parent for a school field trip on Monday morning, I'll reschedule my blog writing time for the afternoon.



STEP 8: USE THE IDEA CITY METHOD



Good news! You live in Idea City. At any moment, you may be inspired with a bright idea or simply remember a task that needs doing. To avoid distracting yourself trying to remember the idea, put all your ideas in one place. The goal is to document the idea, inspiration or task so you don't forget. By writing it down, you improve focus on your current task.

An Effective Productivity Approach

What I call the Idea City Method, is not a new productivity idea. I've heard variations discussed by many students and writers. By following three simple steps, you increase your productivity.

First, capture any idea as it occurs to you. Just jot it down quickly and continue with your current task. Capture personal and professional ALL in one place. Once the idea is documented forget about it until step 2.

Next, schedule 30 – 60 minutes every day to review your idea notes. During your Idea City time, take immediate action on any item that can be completed during this daily appointment for one.

Finally, schedule time to execute more complex tasks. Make an appointment with yourself to pay your bills, get a haircut or review the proofs of your new book. Simply moving the idea to your calendar means you're done with that item for today.

This approach echoes what we've already talked about in Step Three: Turn Off Notifications and Step Four: Your Email is an Eyesore. To simplify the digital cleanse, I've purposely repeated simple processes rather than having a different dance routine for each action

As with other steps in the digital decluttering process, how to capture your ideas is a matter of personal preference. Some people prefer a digital solution while others go analog with pen and paper.

There are a wide range of digital solutions. Evernote, Google Drive, Basecamp and many other applications. A spreadsheet or word processing document work, too. Please use what works for you and your workflow.

Analog solutions are varied, too. You can use a scrap of paper, loose-leaf paper or a notebook. I must admit to a deep love of pretty and geeky notebooks so I've always got a few spare in my



Ways to Capture Your Ideas

desk drawer. I use pencil and I've seen my friend, artist Joyelle Brandt, use a full rainbow of colored pens.

Digitize Your Analog Notes

I must admit I'm a little bit sneaky in my execution of the Idea City Method. I use pencil in a notebook to capture my ideas. However, my current notebook is a specially formatted Evernote notebook from Moleskine. My quick scribbles and sketches can easily be converted to digital notes, when needed.

STEP 9:

FIGURE OUT YOUR

3P

Your 3P is my solution to one of the most common social media objections. People worry about sharing too much online and the resulting loss of privacy. I understand the concern.

If you're using social media in your private life, nothing obligates you to share on a social network. What stays offline, stays private. It's your choice to share (or not) with family and friends or to interact with others who share your hobby. What you share is your choice. However, if you are using social networks for business purposes, you're going to have to share something. I recommend you divide yourself into three parts, your 3P. These parts are professional, personal and private.

Professional

Your professional part is fully public. You share expertise, experience, anecdotes, details about your job and information about any products or services your company offers. Sharing about your professional life can help your brand with sales and marketing. It can also position you for your next job or entrepreneurial venture. What you share publicly helps establish credibility, cultivate a network and demonstrate authority.

PERSONAL

To be successful online in business, you also need to share another part of yourself that I call the personal part, the next third of your 3P. Your personal part might include a love of hockey, a passion for rescue dogs and commitment to creative journaling. This is the part that humanizes you. It makes you a complete person not just a selling machine. It allows you to establish rapport and garner trust.

You share to find mutual interests as a lead into in-depth conversations. Your willingness to share more than just sales messages and marketing banter makes you a whole person. This is really important. Who you are and how you related to people has to be more than shop talk. You can't be all about business all the time.

Through your online posts, comments and interactions you must blend your professional part with your personal part. Remember this is SOCIAL networking, even if it's conducted digitally, you are still interacting with real people. The personal things you share can make it more enjoyable to do business together.

PRIVATE

The private part of yourself stays offline. You decide to keep details of your hemorrhoids, money troubles and off-color humor private. Politics and religion are often kept private, too, just like a dinner party with the extended family. If you're not sure what to keep private, ask yourself two questions:

What do you want to hide from your Mom?

What would embarrass you if it appeared on the front page of a newspaper?

The answers to those two questions make up your private life. If you want to keep it private, keep it offline. You choose. If you don't share it, it's not online. You are in control. (Well, almost in control. Remember that others can quote your contentious comments and share photos or videos of other embarrassing moments. That's a big topic for another day.)

Divide and Blend

How to express the divide and the blend between the professional, personal and private parts of your life, is entirely up to you. Every person's answer will be unique. As an example, here's a snapshot of my 3P breakdown:

Professional: communicator, writer, instructional designer, teacher, speaker

Personal: parent, homeowner, Star Wars fan, doodles with fine art supplies

Private: asthmatic, struggled with postpartum depression

[Note: I have now made these private parts into personal parts in the interests of illustrating the 3P.]

Be Authentic

Share only what you're comfortable sharing. Don't create an artificial self online. I'd rather you shared a minimal amount and were true to yourself. Faking it will not get you anywhere online or in life. Authenticity is the nobler path. It's also the path to less digital clutter.

STEP 10

ESTABLISH YOUR RESPONSE TIME

Establishing your response time is key to a sane digital life. As you're reading this book, I think it's safe to assume you want more calm than chaos.

Let's say you have four active social media accounts. In addition to posting your own content, you'll need to reply and follow-up with your friends, fans and followers. In order to do that effectively, you need to have a system for monitoring mentions and replies as well as a firm grasp on your response time.

Monitoring

Everyone has their own preferences for monitoring social accounts. Some keep active tabs open in a browser. Others use a social media dashboard like Hootsuite. Still others prefer to have mobile apps on their home screen and notifications turned on. (Those folks should read my earlier notes on why to turn off notifications.) Whatever your preference, be consistent about monitoring social media. Schedule time in your calendar, if that helps you.

How fast is fast enough?

How fast you reply may depend on whether it's a personal interaction or a business response. Personal interactions can happen in your leisure time or during your bus commute. Friends and family understand that you may be at work and unavailable much of the day.

Business responses are different. In some cases, the client expects an instant reply. In other cases, you've got a bit of time but how fast is fast enough?

If you respond instantly, you must have a workflow that can tolerate constant interruptions. Is your topic time sensitive? Flight delays and traffic updates are only useful in real time.

If you respond within a few hours, this may be perfectly reasonable to your clients. They know you're busy working for them (or other clients) and they want you to be focused and doing a great job.

If you respond within a day, I think that's the outside limit for an acceptable response for business purposes. Respond within one business day, if at all possible.

If you only respond when you remember to check or when you have time or when you feel like it, I suggest you need to rethink being in business. Looking after your customers has to be a priority.

Worst of all is no response at all. How does that make your clients feel? Will they want to do business with you? Of course, not. You are at risk of losing a customer to a competitor.

What's your response time going to be?

I encourage you to make a decision on your response time and be consistent with it. Fans and followers will grow accustomed to hearing from you in a certain interval. For my own work, I choose to respond within a few hours. Each weekday, I schedule social media time for early morning, just after lunch and evening. At a minimum, I'll be responding three times a day. Admittedly, weekends response times are less structured as I integrate any weekend work into family time.

Respond to everything?

One last thing. Social media is about conversation and building relationships. It's about being present and part of what's happening. Respond to as many people as you can. And know that it's ok when the conversation fizzles out. Face-to-face conversations do that, too.



Digital Cleanse, Phase One, Done!

Bravo! Well done! You've taken your first steps to declutter your data. I know it feels good. Don't lose that good feeling. Remember that digital decluttering is an ongoing process. You have to be vigilant. Think of it as a weight loss maintenance program. I'd love to hear about your successes and challenges throughout the process. I'm @AngelaCrocker on Twitter and Instagram. You'll also find me on Facebook and LinkedIn. Find social media links at AngelaCrocker.com plus my email and snail mail addresses.

If you're ready to declutter at a deeper level, look for my ebook *The Digital Cleanse*. It includes many more ways to declutter your data and take charge of your digital life.

Coming Soon From Angela Crocker

The Content Planner: A Complete Guide to Organize and Share Your Ideas Online

Angela Crocker wants to help business owners create and share more quality, original content on their website, blog, podcast or e-mail newsletter. Business owners know the value of sharing original content yet they struggle to take action. Limited staff time, budget considerations, uninspired ideas and difficulties with the technology are all hurdles to success. The Content Planner is the step-by-step guide to brainstorm, capture and organize ideas to share online efficiently and effectively.

