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Ways to Better Manage Your Computer Files

The goal of computer file management is to ensure that you can always find what you're looking for, even years after its creation. What good is all your hard work if you can't find where you stored your file?

These 10 file management tips will help you keep your files accessible:

- **Organize by file types.**
Make applications easier to find by creating a folder called Program Files on your drive and keeping all your applications there. For instance, the executables for Word, PowerPoint, QuickBooks, and WinZip should all reside in the Program Files folder.
- **One Place for all.**
Decide to put all of your documents in one spot on your computer, such as a specific spot on a shared server or hard drive, or your My Documents folder. Whether it's a spreadsheet, a business letter or a PowerPoint presentation, make sure to save it there. This will make it easier to locate your files and to run backups.
- **Create folders.**
Having trouble naming your folders? Envision your folders as the drawers of your computer's filing cabinet. Use plain language to name your folders. Otherwise, you may be looking at this list of folders in the future and wonder what "rtm" or some other invented abbreviation means. Create file and folder names that are meaningful to you. Keep business and personal folders separate.
- **Nest folders within folders.**
Create other folders within these main folders as need arises. For instance, a folder called "taxes" might contain folders called "2007", and "2008". A folder containing photos might include the folders "Vacations" and "Birthdays". The goal is to have every file in a folder rather than having a bunch of orphan files listed.
- **Follow the file naming conventions.**
Do not use spaces in file names, keep file names under 27 characters, and use all lower case. So a file name should be "susansmithresume" rather than "Susan Smith".
- **Be specific.**
Give files logical, specific names and include dates in file names if possible. The goal when naming files is to be able to tell what the file is about without having to open it and review. So if the document is a cover letter for your resume, call it "SusanResume091207" rather than "Resume". This allows you to know to whom the letter was written without opening it.
- **File as you go.**
The best time to file a document is when you first create it. So get in the habit of using the "Save As" dialogue box to file and name your document. Put it in the right place in the first place.
- **Order your files for your convenience.**
If there are folders or files that you use a lot, force them to the top of the file list by renaming them with a "1" or an "aa" at the beginning of the file name.

- **Clear out your files regularly.**
Sometimes what's old is obvious as in the example of the folder named "taxes" above. If it's not, keep your folders uncluttered by clearing out the old files. Do NOT delete finance related files unless you are absolutely certain that you will never need the file again. Instead, in your main collection of folders in My Documents, create a folder called "old" or "archive" and move old files into it as you come across them. Remember to keep your archive folders just as organized as your active folders.
- **Back up your files regularly.**
Whether you're copying your files onto a flash drive, a disk, or an online storage site, it's important to set up and follow a regular back up regimen. Protect your files from loss due to viruses, hackers, and damage.