

A little help to stay organized



Alex Kinsella

I've grown to love routine and order, even though it can be a difficult goal with my wife and I both working and the children having an expanding slate of extra-curricular activities.

I have experienced a bit of success on this organizational quest in the past year, so I'd like to offer some tech suggestions, along with a decidedly low-tech idea, for getting your life organized. It's never too late to start.

TODOIST

Managing multiple projects at home and work can seem daunting. While Android and iOS smartphones do come with their own task and reminder apps, Todoist is a third-party application that offers significant improvements over the stock apps.

At its core, Todoist is designed to let you quickly add tasks and set due dates. You simply click Todoist's + icon, enter the task name, set a due date and click done.

In addition to due dates, Todoist allows you to set dates for recurring tasks, which I find helpful for things such as reminders to change smoke alarm batteries or to check the salt in the water softener. Tasks can also be grouped into projects, which is really useful for home renovation or vacation planning.

Todoist is a free app, but does offer a paid version (\$4 per month) that lets you set reminders – including location-based ones.

These are great for complex scheduling or for everyday tasks: think picking up your kid from school and being reminded to look for her 80th pair of lost mittens.

Todoist is available for iOS and Android smartphones and Windows and Mac desktops. It also has browser plugins for Chrome, Firefox and Safari. You can find download links at todoist.com.

TILE TRACKERS

My father ran his photography business out of our home while I was growing up. This meant that from an early age, my brother and I learned that “a place for everything and everything in its place” was not just a cliché, it was the way of life. An errant lens cap meant an expensive piece of glass was exposed and unprotected – and that was as big of an issue as opening the darkroom door at the wrong time.

Fast forward to today and you can find me on laundry day folding my T-shirts and returning them to the correct dresser drawers. The rest of my family, however, doesn't share my discipline. Each day in our house any number of things – the

aforementioned lost mittens, for example – go missing. This includes the most important and most often misplaced items – the car keys.

Tile Trackers are the solution. These square keychain-like devices are Bluetooth-enabled tags designed to help you locate things like your keys or bags. When a Tile Tracker-protected item is lost, simply open the Tile app on your phone and an audible alert will be activated.

Recently, my neighbours showed me a valuable use for Tile Trackers I hadn't considered. Their son carries an EpiPen to school and often it would go missing somewhere on school grounds. EpiPens are an expensive necessity, so a lost one is a major issue. Now, with a Tile Tracker on the EpiPen bag, the stress of finding the life-saving instrument has been reduced.

Tile Trackers are available in three options – Standard, Slim and Pro – and work with iOS and Android smartphones. The Standard and Pro options come with replaceable batteries that last for one year. The Standard comes in one (\$29.99) and four-packs (\$69.99) while the Pro is available in one (\$39.99) and two-packs (\$69.99). The main differences between the Standard and Pro options are that the Pro tracker works up to 90 metres away from your phone versus 45 metres with the Standard. The Pro also has a louder audible alert. The Slim version is available in a one

pack for \$39.99 and is thin enough to fit in your wallet. The only drawback is that its battery is not replaceable. You can learn more at www.thetileapp.com.

BULLET JOURNALING

In tech, we often talk about “first principles.” These are basic assumptions that cannot be deduced any further. It's a way of getting to the core of a problem so you can start working to solve it. I was first introduced to this idea watching an interview with Elon Musk in which he talks about first principles when designing Tesla electric vehicles. (If that sounds interesting and you'd like to learn more, here's a link to watch the interview: bit.ly/gmtechmarch.)

When focusing on getting organized, I decided to try a first-principles approach. After some research and digging, I learned about Bullet Journaling, and it changed the way I work.

The Bullet Journal is an analog system

created by Ryder Carroll, a designer based in New York. In his words, the bullet journal is meant “to help you track the past, organize the present and plan for the future.”

Bullet Journaling “is a way to not lose the notes or reminders you write in a sea of pages,” says Samantha Kristoferson, co-founder of KW Professional Organizers. “The bullet journal allows you to build an easy-to-follow system for recording content but uses a ‘table of contents,’ if you will, so that you can quickly find what you need when you need it.”

I found that my task lists had become unruly and I would often avoid things I had written down. “The bullet journal allows you to reflect on a list if you create one in the journal and forces you to be mindful of how long it has existed,” Kristoferson says. “Have you been trying to finish things on that list for three days?

Three months? A year?”

Paper and pen can offer less distraction than a digital solution. “There is also some significant research that states there is something to the old pen and paper in terms of how the brain works and what is connecting and firing when you actually take time out to write,” Kristoferson says.

You can learn more about Bullet Journals at bulletjournal.com. KW Professional Organizers also offers online getting-started classes and in-person workshops throughout the year. You can learn more at kwprofessionalorganizers.com/kwpo-academy.

So whether it's downloading a new app or picking up a new notebook, take time to plan out how you want to organize your world and choose what works best for you. 

Alex Kinsella has been part of Waterloo Region's tech community since 2004 and is always looking for the next great gadget (or tacos, if it's Tuesday). Find him on Twitter at @alexkinsella

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