Marin Rose

To-do or Not To-do

Successful use of a to-do app depends on actually using it

Although I am, at heart, a traditionalist, I have become a digital technology convert in the last decade or so. The advantages of digital technology over pen and paper for managing task lists, schedules and contacts are various. As a solo-preneur who spends much of my time away from my home office, digital solutions result in:

- Less paper to manage
- More flexibility to accommodate clients
- Greater mobility
- A smaller margin for error
- Easier information retrieval
- Cleaner workspace

So when it comes to helping clients increase efficiency and productivity at home and at work, I advocate for switching to digital methods. However, the glut of programs, apps, services and devices available these days is daunting. I'm often asked which are best. My answer? Whichever ones are comfortable enough for you to fully commit to using.

Most of the products available are pretty good. For me, a combination of Gmail, Google Calendar, Dropbox and Constant Contact does the trick. If you have a system that works for you – even if it is an old-fashioned datebook – then stick with it. But if you're looking for some of the capabilities I mentioned above to free you from the paper pile, the only successful system is the one that you use solely and consistently.

The clients whose systems fail are the clients who bounce from one shiny new app to the next, or who use the calendar function built in to their mobile device *and* their whiteboard *and* a smattering of sticky notes to track their appointments.

It's important to consider a variety of options when choosing a system to ensure you're choosing one that accommodates your unique lifestyle, organizational style and thought process. But once you commit, it's crucial that you use that system fully and exclusively. Digital technology is a powerful tool but it only works if you use it correctly.

Free Document Shredding You've gone paperless. Now what to do with that bin full of sensitive documents? Take advantage of free, unlimited, on-site shredding courtesy of Libra Organizing. Saturday, May 2, 8 -11 a.m. at The Cleveland Group, CPAs parking lot on Davis Road. Shredding and recycling provided by Augusta Data Storage, Inc. Stop by my table for free refreshments and organizing tips.

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Professional Organizing Coach Marin Rose of Libra Organizing is celebrating five years organizing people's spaces and lives to help them become happier and more productive – and less stressed. Contact Marin at libraorganizing.com to schedule a free organizing assessment in your home or office, or to hire her as a speaker.

> ## When choosing a system, ensure you're choosing one that accommodates your unique lifestyle, organizational style and thought process.

Jeff Asselin

Program Perks

Custom software has edge over off-the-shelf choices

Today's businesses are not questioning whether or not to invest in computer software to run their operations – they're asking themselves do I buy "off-the-shelf" pre-built computer programs or do I opt for a custom solution to fit my company's individual needs? How do you know which one makes the most sense?

There are literally thousands of "canned" business software solutions available. Some solutions need to be installed onto local computers while others can be web-based, coming with a variety of payment and subscription models. While these programs appear to be simple and easy to use, a business owner needs to understand the pitfalls to watch out for with each.

When using pre-built software, a business is limited to the functionality, design and features unique to that program. Often these software programs do not allow for complete customization, affecting your company's operations.

Programs such as Quickbooks and various Customer Relations Management (CRM) tools can only be tweaked to a certain extent. The challenge becomes even more painful when you want to share data between applications in your own format. Reporting can be clunky and displaying information in a meaningful fashion might not exist in several formats.

Staying current on software updates can be an expensive proposition. Many business software programs offer releases to their systems several times a year, requiring businesses to spend countless upgrade dollars to have the latest bells and whistles, including security updates.

We've seen company websites and software programs come under attack by online hackers. Fixing software after these attacks often requires repairing broken databases as well as salvaging breached information and can become quite expensive. While no software is ever deemed "hack proof," publicly available software programs are easy prey for these malicious attacks. Custom software can often be "off the radar," with more levels of security built in.

One of the main reasons to develop a custom software solution over an "off-the shelf" product is a company's ability to design a program that is exactly what you need from the ground up. Some businesses need to track, organize, measure and securely store their client data or employee records on their own platform. Custom software is often

the best and most sensible solution to meet those needs.

How do you determine if a custom software solution is right for your business? Ask yourself three simple questions: Is there an existing solution out there that will meet your needs for the way you do business? Do you have the luxury of time required to have someone build your custom software? Do you have the capital investment available to fund custom software?

Custom software versus off-the-shelf applications boils down to your company's priorities and strategic business plan. Pre-built software is limited and can affect your company's ability to grow at scale. Having a custom built software solution gives you the ability to add custom features unique to your business, provide in-house support and correct software issues quickly. Custom software can become a business advantage over your competitors who are still using their pre-built software solutions.

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