

How To Be More Efficient With Apps For Work Or Home

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By Teresa Meek

Whether you want to streamline tasks at work or better organize your personal life, chances are there's an app for that.

Productivity apps have become a booming business as people strive to become more efficient and achieve a better work/life balance in a world where technology never sleeps.

Since you can't clone yourself — at least, not yet — here are a few apps that can help you get things done quicker, leaving more time for rest, relaxation and fun.





(photo source: iStock)

Handy work apps

- **Google Drive:** This cloud storage app lets you upload files (documents, spreadsheets, presentations, etc.) and collaborate with other users in real time. Files are searchable and stored to the cloud. You can easily convert a finished version to a Word doc, PDF or other document format. Drive is widely used — even in corporate environments — and free.
- **Pushbullet:** You can move files, pictures and links between a variety of devices with this app. Pushbullet also sends a pop-up message to your PC for every notification you get on your phone or tablet. If you dismiss the notification on one device, Pushbullet takes it off everything else, eliminating all those time-wasting duplications. Can't function without your task list in front of you? The app will “push” your task list from your PC to all your other devices, or even to your friends' devices. And it can send you customized reminders, such as “If tomorrow's forecast calls for rain, send me a note.” Free.
- **Asana:** This app is a teamwork communications manager that lets people working on a project share and manage work without using email. Each team has an online workspace, which contains projects and tasks. Users can visualize goals and check off milestones, as well as share ideas. Free for teams up to 15; scaling up to a maximum of \$100 for 800 members.

- Evernote: Using an elephant as its icon is appropriate for an app that helps users remember things by letting them categorize and store notes, documents or photos, and access them from any device. It offers a “Web clipper” to save Web pages with a click and provides three levels of note subordination and tagging to help you find stuff when you forget where you put it. Free for storage up to 60 MB of data a month; premium version offers up to 1 GB for \$5 a month.

Apps for personal tasks

- LastPass: Tired of clicking “Forgot my password” and waiting for an email to get you where you want to go online? Try this password manager that not only remembers your passwords but also can create stronger ones so you’re less likely to get hacked. If you’re using “password” or “123456” to access your accounts, this is a must-have. Works with most browsers. Free for PCs, \$1 a month for mobile access.
- Mint: Avoid late-payment fees, keep track of your finances, and set a budget with this personal finance app which lets you see all your updated financial accounts — checking, savings, credit cards, investment accounts — in one place. The app also creates budgets based on your activities or lets you set your own. Free.
- Food on the Table: Want to eat healthy but don’t have time to plan meals? Try, this app that not only lets you select recipes, but builds a shopping list for them. You can check off the items you already have, and the app will check to see if your local grocery store has the rest, alerting you to sales and discounts on your selected items at stores in your area. Free.
- Auto Care Free: Does your car need an oil change? Maybe it’s time to change the brake fluid too — or did you do that last time? With this app, you can get reminders of any service your car needs, as well as keep track of gas expenses, fuel economy, distance traveled and total cost of ownership. Manages an unlimited number of cars. Free.

Finally, if too many apps and notifications are slowing you down, you can always try Focus Lock for Android, which bills itself as “the digital Adderall of the distracted and procrastinating masses.” It disables the apps and social networks that are taking you off task for 25 minutes, then gives you a break for five minutes (or a time of your choice) when you can see them again. Mac users can use a similar app appropriately called SelfControl. Both apps are free.

In today’s hyper-connected environment, it’s easy to feel overwhelmed by incoming demands. Productivity apps won’t stop the flow, but they will help you manage tasks more efficiently so that you spend less time on drudge work and more on things you enjoy.

Teresa Meek is a Seattle-based freelance journalist, writer, and editor whose work has appeared in Newsday, the Miami Herald, the St. Petersburg Times, the Baltimore Sun, and other newspapers and magazines.



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