



I.T. My support network.

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Organising and planning daily life is a complex affair and if one includes the working day, the requirements for support can be many. It seems logical to start at the beginning – that first early-morning alarm, which may come from the ever present mobile phone, with its calendar, reminders and contacts along with messages and conversations that fill our waking hours.

1. My mobile.

Most mobile phones seem to have the basic features mentioned above and they can be put to good use in planning and organisation. Having turned off the alarm at the start of the day, you can use it to remind yourself about items for the rest of the day. There is a bonus if the calendar function allows for appointments to have alarms, as these can be set for any time before the event. They can also be set for daily, weekly or annual reminders such as birthdays. Phones like the Blackberry, iPhone, H.T.C. smart phones and others can synchronise with your computer, so you can share

contacts and calendar items in all sorts of places. I use **Google Calendar** with Outlook and Microsoft Exchange at work and this set up synchronises with my iPhone – I can share calendars online with my family and in the office with work colleagues. This set up can also act as a backup if my laptop goes down or I lose my phone.

2. To-do list.

Having realised I have a series of appointments throughout the day the next task is my to-do list to make sure I prepare and add all the other pending items. This can be done on the phone, on the laptop or tablet device or even on a piece of paper, if that can be counted as information technology!

I find the physical act of writing will often make me remember something more than when I'm typing, however the laptop is at my work and so I tend to jot notes into a free program called **Evernote**. This can also be used online if you are not at your own computer but can log onto the Internet. There is also an app for most phones so once again all the notes can be synchronised. The notes look like sticky notes but they can be 'tagged' with keywords so that you can search for them later. On the iPhone and Blackberry it's possible to dictate directly into Evernote and if you have taken a snapshot of an item with text this will be found despite the fact that it is in a picture format because Evernote has a basic optical character recognition system.

3. Mapping thoughts.

If making notes or to-do lists does not suit your style, you may prefer making a concept map of your thoughts for the day and then linking important items or numbering them. You could use a free program like **X-mind** which can be downloaded onto a Windows computer or a U.S.B. pen drive to make it more portable. You can organise ideas with pictorial links to boost your memory. It is also possible to use this program online. The same is true of **MindMeister** that synchronises with a mobile phone app.

I haven't mentioned any commercial products but I use a range of different mapping programs depending on the task involved. If I am working on a project and need a time line and Gantt charts then **MindView**, **MindManager** or **MindGenius** are good options and they integrate with Microsoft Office programs. All these applications can be used with a keyboard for rapid fire idea generation and they can also include pictures, charts, webpages and audio files. List versions can be made or slides for presentations. Each of these programs has a professional version as well as a more basic option for a home user.

4. Report writing.

When it comes to writing reports, concept or mind maps can be a good start but you can also organise your Evernote stickies into a notebook with individual notes acting as an outline for each paragraph. Although I use Microsoft Office for much of my writing I have dictated this article into Dragon pad that's available in **Dragon NaturallySpeaking**. I also made some notes whilst travelling into work using Dragon Dictation on my iPhone. The combined effort was then formatted in Microsoft Word and spell checked.

I have also used Microsoft speech recognition with good results, especially when using Skype to communicate with colleagues and share documents. If I'm online I use Google Docs and here you can see the revisions that you and your colleagues make. A document can then be transferred back into Microsoft Word where the spell checking tends to be better, but not as good as those phonetic spell checkers found in most commercial text-to-speech programs or a specialist spellchecking program such as **Oribi VeritySpell**. If I'm concerned about backing up a document, I might use the free service called **Dropbox**. It is also possible to share documents online with this service.

5. Writing online.

Writing online requires good proofreading as mistakes in a blog or update news item are soon spotted. There are spellcheckers available within browsers and Google has its own toolbar with a spellchecker and dictionary that works with Mozilla Firefox and Internet Explorer. There is also the **ATbar** spellchecker that works with any browser. The **Ginger** and **Ghotit** online services also offer a form of grammar checking, as they will evaluate a complete sentence for its errors. If you find you are writing online and need some free portable assistive technologies it is worth looking at some of the **portable apps** which can provide colour tinting for the screen, basic text-to-speech and a T-bar viewing ruler that can help with reading online.

6. Reading from the screen.

Reading from the screen is not always that easy and research has shown that when we try to do it from a small screen, we often find it hard to understand or remember what we have read (**Nielsen, 2011 Mobile Content Is Twice as Difficult**). I like to read documents actively, especially if I cannot print them out and use colour highlighters. I try to annotate documents – the latest version of **OneNote** works alongside most Microsoft Office applications and in my iPhone. The other option is to listen to the text while on the move and for this I have been using a small free app called **Vod Lite** on my iPhone. Text is highlighted and read with the built in text to

speech (VoiceOver). There are many free programs which will read text aloud on computers and provide Mp3 versions of the text such as the M.S. Word add on **WordTalk**, which also offers text highlighting. Texthelp **Read and Write**, **ClaroRead** and many other similar programs not only offer text-to-speech with text highlighting, but also the ability to have P.D.F.s read aloud and even inaccessible text that is in a picture format using screen capture technologies.

7. Studying and working.

Capturing notes and references about other people's work can be important and **Zotero**, is one option as a free online service that also works as an independent application or within the Mozilla Firefox browser. The program allows you to synchronise the data that you have collected with notes and download them into your documents there is also a portable version. **Topicmarks** is another free online service that allows you to upload documents to have the text summarised and find the key words and provide an index. It may not always be totally accurate, but it can give you some breathing space if you are dealing with a long article and you need some key points in a hurry. [No longer available]

8. Conclusion.

Within this short article it has not been possible to provide a full list of I.T. support technologies, but there are some useful blogs such as **Techno Dys** and the **B.D.A.'s technologies website** which can offer further guidance. If I find something on the web I want to recall, I link to it on my **iGoogle (NA)** home page so that when I open my browser, I can see all the new items that have been written in the blogs I follow. You can do this by linking the web or **R.S.S. feeds**. It is also possible to add links to Twitter or Facebook accounts to keep your updates in one place. Finally, if you do not use iGoogle try the **Netvibes** dashboard to provide a very visual I.T. support network.

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