



WHITEPAPER:

# The Costs Associated with Disorganization

Brother International Corporation conducted a survey to determine how disorganization affects office productivity and how workers viewed themselves as well as others regarding disorganization.

The following data was compiled from the survey conducted. Survey methodology and criteria follows at the end of this report.

## Executive Summary

The survey findings indicate that the cost of workplace disorganization may go far beyond just monetary loss. Responses gathered from nearly 800 U.S. employees hint that the search for lost and misplaced materials – which accounts for nearly 38 hours, or approximately one work week annually, per employee – may have a profound impact on professional perception, productivity and morale. In addition, the survey found that the costs associated for full-time employees looking for misplaced items in the office tops 89 billion annually.

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## THE PRICE OF DISORGANIZATION: IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT THE MONEY

Just-released survey findings on workplace disorganization indicate that while the annual cost of U.S. job-related inefficiency for full-time employees looking for misplaced items in the office tops \$89 billion annually – the ramifications may go far beyond lost money.

In fact, the recent survey responses of nearly 800 U.S. employees hints that the search for lost and misplaced materials – which accounts for nearly 38 hours, or approximately one work week annually, per employee – may have a profound secondary impact on professional perception, workplace productivity and organizational morale.

## Disorganization: It's not just about the money

One example of the extra-monetary impact of disorganization is the finding that 37 percent of survey respondents admit to having gone into a work meeting feeling unprepared. This number rises to nearly 50 percent amongst Gen Y office workers, a group that faces crushing pressure to find and keep employment in today's battered economy. Approximately 37 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds have been underemployed or out of work during the recession, the highest share among the age group in more than three decades, according to a Pew Research Center study released in February of this year, *USA Today* reports.

In addition to the stress of feeling unprepared for work-related meetings, survey responses underscore the negative opinions held towards those with a disorganized workspace. The disorganized, or cluttered, workspace is considered “unprofessional” by 86 percent of respondents. Worse, 80 percent agree that someone who is disorganized “hurts the productivity of the whole office.” Adding to the negative opinion towards the organizationally-challenged, when given a choice between “a cluttered desk is a sign of a cluttered mind” and “a cluttered desk is a sign of a genius at work”, 71 percent of survey participants feel that “a cluttered desk is a sign of a cluttered mind”.

### **It's not me...it's the other guys (and, boy, are they wasting time)**

Perhaps signaling their negative perceptions of, and fear of association with, their less-than-organized co-workers, 85 percent of respondents say **their** work area is “more organized” than those of their office mates and 87 percent admit that on those times that their space is cluttered, they “feel they are less productive.”

Yet, despite the high percentage of office workers who claim to be more organized than their peers, 82 percent of survey respondents admit that, in a typical week, they have “wasted” up to 30 minutes doing things “not part of their daily work tasks.” These activities include personal calls (62 percent) or taking care of “personal business” (57 percent).

And 66 percent admit to spending up to 30 minutes a week simply looking for misplaced work items at their desk or around the office. Another 56 percent claim to spend a similar amount of time “looking for files they cannot find” on their computer, while more than one-in-three say they “somewhat” or “very” often must spend time reprinting previously created documents because they have been misplaced. This figure balloons to 48 percent of Gen Y employees, a group already under severe marketplace employment pressure.

### **Did you happen to see my....?**

According to survey results, the workplace can sometimes resemble the mythical Bermuda Triangle, in the way that office supplies disappear, never to be found again. But rather than UFO's, sea monsters, piracy or simply bad weather, the disappearance of these office supplies is a direct result of employee disorganization, the survey results suggest.

Nearly three-of-10 survey respondents have lost a file folder in the past year, while 26 percent have misplaced their mobile phone, calculator (25 percent), memory stick (25 percent). That number balloons to 46 percent when briefcases, suitcases, lap top computers, PDA and other devices are added to the list. Again, Gen Y employees suffer higher rates of loss: 40 percent in this age group have lost a file folder and 45 percent a memory drive.

Surprisingly – in light of today's financial need to quickly recoup personal outlays on travel expenses – 30 percent of office workers surveyed have lost out on getting reimbursed simply because they misplaced or lost their receipts.

### **Workplace Disorganization: An Analysis**

It may be human nature to occasionally “forget,” “misplace” or “lose” valuable workplace materiel, according to Linda Sanford, Director of Marketing for Electronic Stationery Products, Brother International Corp. However, in these economic times, the cost of such disorganization in terms of lost time, money, employment opportunity and workplace morale, is too high for employers – and their employees – to ignore any longer.

The survey also uncovered that when you combine the time spent searching for misplaced items in the office with searching for lost files on the computer the estimated annual dollars spent reaches more than 177 billion annually.

"The aggregate dollar estimate attached to disorganization, whether due to searching for lost items in the office and on the computer, or for simply to doing things that are not part of daily tasks, is staggering," she said.

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### **Brother P-Touch Cost of Disorganization Survey Topline Results**

- The estimated annual dollars spent on looking for misplaced items in the office is \$89,840,657,069 among full-time office professionals.
- Estimated 38 working hours (or close to one work week) per person each year are lost as a result of looking for misplaced items in the office.
- 66% of office workers having spent up to 30 minutes of time during a typical work week looking for things they have misplaced around their office, a major contributing factor for lost time in the office.
- 46% of office workers have lost one of the following items in the past year (a file folder, mobile phone, calculator, flash or memory drive, a briefcase, suitcase, or luggage, lap top computer, or a PDA)
- Close to four in 10 (37%) of office workers have gone into a work meeting feeling unprepared
- Office supplies are on the top of office workers' list of items lost in the last year with close to three in 10 (28%) have lost a file folder in the past year.
- 87% of office workers say when their workspace is disorganized they feel they are less productive than when their workspace is organized
- 86% agree that having a disorganized workspace is unprofessional
- 30% of office workers have lost out on getting reimbursed for a business or travel expense because they misplaced or lost a receipt

### **About the survey**

The **Cost of Disorganization** survey was conducted by GfK Roper Custom Research North America, among 777 full- and part-time U.S. professionals in April 2010. Sample results are subject to a +/-3 percent margin of error. The average income of survey respondents was \$68,638.

*Please note that due to a disorganized workplace, the average minutes per day spent looking for misplaced items in the office and on the computer is 19, and it represents 3.8% of total working hours in a typical week. The estimated annual dollars spend looking for misplaced items in the office and on the computer is \$177,846,846,126 among full-time office professionals.*

**Formula:** Census: # of people who identified themselves as a full-time management, professional sales or office professional. Total number 69.7million

*Avg. hours worked per week: 41*

*Avg. minutes per day spend looking for misplaced items in the office and on the computer: 19*

*Avg. hours per year spend looking for misplaced items in the office and on the computer: 76*

*Avg. minutes per week spend looking for misplaced items in the office and on the computer: 95*

*Avg. hours per week spend looking for misplaced items in the office and on the computer: 1.58*

**Total dollars spent looking for misplaced items in the office and on the computer= (AVERAGE NUMBER OF HOURS SPENT PER OFFICE WORKER)(ANNUAL PERSONAL INCOME) / (HOURS WORKED PER WEEK \* 48) \* [CENSUS # OF OFFICE WORKERS]**

That is, we calculated the number of hours spent looking for misplaced items in the office and on the computer per office worker in the sample, multiply this by the that worker's estimated hourly wage, average this value across all office workers in the sample, and then multiply this by the Census-derived number of office workers.

*GfK Survey Sample:*

The sample size was 777 respondents (individuals who identified themselves as either a part-time or full-time employee, spend either a great deal or a fair amount of time in an office setting and work 25+ hrs a week)

**KEY DATA**

- Census office workers:	69,705,861
- GfK Respondents:	777
- 48 weeks used (based on average workforce vacation and holiday schedules)	

**Methodology**

The questions were asked as part of OMNITEL, a weekly national telephone omnibus service of GfK Custom Research North America. The results contained in this report are based on interviews conducted from April 9-18, 2010 with U.S. residents 18 years of age and over. A total of 2,054 interviews were completed, including 777 with self-identified office workers. Data from the completed interviews are weighted by a custom-designed computer program, which automatically develops a weighting factor for each respondent to ensure proportional representation by five variables: age, sex, education, race and geographic region. The margin of error on weighted data is +/- 3 percentage points for the full sample. The results of this survey are based upon the findings of the survey as conducted by GfK and do not reflect the opinions or expressions of Brother International Corporation.

Each OMNITEL study is based on a random digit dialing (RDD) probability sample of all telephone households in the continental United States. The RDD sampling system is totally computer based and provides an equal probability of selection for each and every household with a landline telephone. Thus, the sample represents landline telephone households with both listed and unlisted phones in their proper proportions. All sample numbers selected by this procedure are subject to an original and at least four follow-up attempts to complete an interview.