

HED: How to optimize and streamline your personal information workflow

DEK: New tools and technologies have made it easier than ever to simplify the way you take in information. Here are five key takeaways that will help you pare down your toolkit.

Changing your own workflow can be a challenge. For years, I've relied on several tools to manage my personal information workflow:

- An RSS reader to show me news posts from sites I choose.
- A read-later service to save things, well, to read later.
- A bookmarking service lets me search and find saved links.
- Social media services (mostly Twitter) to share links.

I wanted a simpler setup. At first, I tried to use Twitter (and Twitter lists) to replace my RSS reader. That didn't work well for me. I really like to read every new post published by the sites I follow. With an RSS reader, I can review every new item. But with Twitter, I felt that I missed too many articles in the stream. I reverted back to using an RSS reader for feeds, and kept Twitter as a place to follow people.

So, I took another look at each tool in my workflow. Here's what I learned—and changed.

1. Tools change

In early 2015, an RSS reader I use [added the ability to save any web page](#) to the RSS reader. That meant I didn't need a separate "read later" app. This allowed me to use one tool, instead of two.

SEE: [My top productivity tools and tricks for managing my daily workflow](#) (ZDNet)

2. Discussions move

Years ago, I began bookmarking to make it easier for people to see things I found interesting. Unfortunately, bookmarking tools never achieved broad adoption. Twitter, however, did. Since I first joined Twitter back in 2007, the number of users far exceeded that of any social bookmarking service.

I decided to create a secondary Twitter account dedicated to links. I didn't want to clutter up my long-standing Twitter account with random links to resources only I find interesting. When I want to save a link, I send a Tweet from this secondary account, sometimes adding a #hashtag or two to aid future searches. And, I can find these links later with [Twitter's advanced search capabilities](#).

3. Links don't last

Next, I reviewed the more than 5,000 bookmarks I'd saved since the days of Del.icio.us. I noticed that, at first, I'd used bookmarks to denote an item to read-later. So, a lot of links were just to posts that, once read, really weren't useful in the long-term.

After following several thousand links, I chose to re-share only a few hundred of those links on Twitter. The vast majority of my bookmarks were either broken or not worth preserving. As I followed each link, I saw lots of "404/not found" messages. When I found a site I wanted to keep, I'd Tweet a link to the site.

Only about 7.5% of my bookmarks remained useful.

4. Save less, search more

I also discovered that I didn't need to save links to certain types of sites. For example, I had lots of links to research reports, slide presentations, and articles reporting results from surveys and/or studies. I can find all of these easily with a search. There's no need for me to bookmark these pages.

SEE: [Seven ways to build brand awareness into your digital strategy](#) (Tech Pro Research)

5. Follow people or feeds

I often found that I had bookmarked several posts written by an author. Again, I realized that I didn't need to save links for each post. Instead, I searched for the author—or, sometimes, the person or organization featured in the post. Then, I subscribed to an RSS feed from their site or followed them on Twitter. Or both.

As a result of my workflow review, I pared down the number of tools I need for the task from four to two: Twitter and an RSS reader. And instead of thousands of useless links, I have a few hundred relevant ones that work. Best of all, I have a system that shows me streams of information from a lot of smart, interesting people.

What do you think?

What are the two best tools you use to track people and news you want to know for work? Let us know in the comments —or, of course, on Twitter.

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