

Staying Productive When Working at Home

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Hey! Thanks for taking time out of your day to read my little e-book. Below I'll be giving you some of my most valuable tips and tricks on staying productive when working from home. These tips can also apply when working from an office or studio.

If you have any question then please don't hesitate to contact me through seb@sebkay.com.

- Seb Kay.

Tracking Your Tasks and Goals

“How do you keep on top of everything?” My wife asked me last week. I hadn't really thought much on it before but it got me thinking about all the tools, tips and tricks I use to manage my very busy days.

I currently do freelance web design whilst running a web design blog (and another big project I can't announce just yet). So that's three things that pretty much take up the majority of my days yet I still find time to relax with a game, movie or TV show when the clock hits 7pm.

The real 'trick' is being scheduled and staying on top of what needs to be done. There will be times when one task gets completed and another one is in the queue. The problem is I don't always want to do that second task right away. Do you know how I get around doing it? I don't. I just do it anyway.

The benefit of just doing things, especially things you don't really *want* to do, is being able to just tackle things as they come and not procrastinate on them. The web design industry is known for its procrastinators. I used to be one and It took a long time to get out of the habit. However looking back I can see why work was never finished on time and goals were never completed.

Keep on top of you tasks and plan your day as precisely as you need to.

Focus on only doing the tasks on your to-do list. That way nothing can get in the way of your daily goals. My personal preference is a combination of Wunderlist (<http://wunderlist.com>) for general tasks and Trello (<http://trello.com>) for specific project objectives like 'code new homepage' or 'design new logo'.

Keeping Motivation Up

Motivation, one of the hardest things to control. A lot like inspiration it comes in finite chunks but by investing some time into cultivating your motivation you'll see a big jump in how much you get done a regular basis.

You probably sit in front of your computer sometimes and do nothing of value. I'm talking about the times you just sit there and stare at the screen, browse Dribbble (<http://dribbble.com>) for way too long or simply click back and forth between things on your screen. I too have sat there refreshing my email over and over hoping something will happen. Here's how to get past it.

Stand up, walk into another room and think about something you want to get done. Just stay there and think about it for a few minutes. Make sure you know exactly what needs to be done and in what order. Now walk back to your computer, sit down and do it.

You'll probably feel a sort of 'pull' at first. Like someone has a rope around you and is trying to pull you in another direction. In the pit of your stomach you'll want to be doing anything else but the task at hand. **DO NOT STOP.** Make sure you complete the task. When you're done take a breath then go have a 15 minute break.

You know what you just did in those few short steps? You overcame procrastination. You said NO to letting your insecurities rule how you go about your day, because that's really what procrastination comes down to, insecurity.

How is being insecure an enablement of procrastination? Because you give in and give up before trying. That fear takes over and you try to rationalise it however best you can.

Next time you feel like putting something off be honest with yourself. Admit why you're feeling that way, then take the necessary steps to smash through it with everything you've got.

Time Away and Fun

Having time away from work is one of the most beneficial things I've ever done for my career. Whenever work gets on top of me I take a step back and go for a walk, watch a movie or play a game. Those are my escapes.

Now this probably sounds a little conflicting with the last section right? How are you supposed to battle procrastination if you're always taking time off to play games and watch TV? The secret is knowing when it's procrastination or just good ol' fashioned stress.

Stress comes into play when there's too much stimulation and not enough of a buffer to handle it. To get past stress you need to have an escape. For some, like me, it's playing games and watching movies, however this isn't recommended in the middle of the day. In that case I go for a nice, slow, relaxing walk around the neighbourhood to get some air and organise my thoughts.

If you're dealing with client work it's always best to stay organised with your email. Have certain time slots during the day in which you can check and reply to clients. If you're running a business do the same but for customer questions and feedback. It'll stop you worrying about your inbox before you even open it up.

Stress gets to all of us eventually. The real secret is stopping it before it gets too bad or to the point where you can't see a viable way out. Stay on top of stress and you'll find everyday is filled with much more ticking off of tasks and less the hair pulling.

The X-Minute Window

Ever heard of the 90 minute work window? You basically work for 90 minutes then rest, work for another 90 minutes then rest and repeat. It's been said that people working brain intensive jobs, like web design, web development or marketing can only make the most out of their brain power for 90 minutes at a time before you start going down hill. The whole '90 minutes' is sometimes 70, 50 or 40 depending on who you're talking to. We all get the mid-afternoon slump at some point and here's how to get over it.

Instead of sticking yourself in a 90 minute window do each task in its own window. So, for example, design the new homepage then take a rest, even if it's only for 15 minutes. You could then code the new homepage in its own window when you get back. Sure the second task might take longer than the first but it gives your mind focus and keeps you moving towards your goals.

By doing this you're letting your brain focus on one task at a time and in turn you're putting every bit of energy you have into it. You also get the benefit of a slight battery recharge when taking those little breaks in between each task.

If you find that taking so many little breaks is having the opposite affect try grouping tasks together in blocks. For example, design *and* code the

homepage then have a little break. Sign up for a newsletter service *and* implement the sign up form on your website, then have another break.

How you go about the technique depends on what works for best you and your situation. Just remember to keep your energy levels high by constantly recharging throughout the day.

Applying the Principals of Productivity

When you get down to it the above is simply a guide. The hardest part is applying it your own environment to work efficiently.

Take everything you've read above and see how it fits into your work life. It may not all work for you but give some of the suggestions a try. I bet you'll be impressed with the results.

Thanks for reading my short e-book on productivity. I'd love to know how the above has worked for you. Send me an email to seb@sebkay.com. I always make time reply to everyone, no matter if it's one person or fifty.