

The Case for Using Multiple Monitors

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Don't be surprised if you see double or even triple when looking at your computer screen in the near future – if you're not already. Multiple monitor computing has become the de-facto standard of working efficiently in today's increasingly demanding technology environment. With modern software and the abundance of information, using just one monitor is like riding a bicycle on a highway – it may get you there, but everyone will comfortably pass you by.

The Numbers Don't Lie

Numerous studies show a tremendous increase in productivity by adding a second monitor to any computer system. Research shows an increase of between 20 percent and 50 percent for accounting professionals. Add a third or even a fourth screen and the percentages are even higher, helping solidify the return on investment for adding multiple monitors.

Multi-Tasking

Using multiple monitors makes many routine computing tasks easier by allowing more visible windows. The ability to see different applications at the same time is invaluable. No more task switching or application toggling, and no more minimizing and maximizing applications. Imagine being able to compare completely different documents side by side and reading and answering email while browsing the Internet, or keeping a web browser or other tool on one monitor for online research and having a second monitor for taking notes. You can even spread one application, such as Excel, to span across the multiple screens in order to view a workbook in its entirety. For accounting professionals, the common process of tax preparation and review is greatly enhanced: a multiple monitor system allows the user to have tax software on one screen and source documents on another. Such systems also help in audits, keeping workpapers on one screen and trial balances on another.

What You Need

Setting up multiple monitors may be easier than you think. All you need are two video adapters or a video adapter capable of handling multiple screens. The monitors don't even have to be the same brand, type or size, although it is easier on the eyes to look at two screens of similar dimensions when gazing from side to side. Single, large widescreen monitors that are 22 inches or larger can be as productive as smaller, dual-screen monitors that are 20 inches or smaller. When used in a dual monitor setup, large widescreen monitors greatly enhance the experience; you're essentially looking at the equivalent of four screens.



What Were You Waiting For?

The trend toward multiple-monitor computing actually began more than ten years ago. In fact, Microsoft operating systems have been multiple-monitor compatible since Windows 98. Of course, the cost of additional displays – especially the flat panel variety – was quite high back then. But today, multiple monitor setups are generally budget-friendly and cost is typically not a barrier. They are becoming ubiquitous on a variety of business professionals' desks, including accountants. It's easy to understand why studies show increased efficiency, especially for those in the financial arena, where comparing figures, charts and other information is quite common.

It's Good for the Planet

The move to multiple screens also increases the amount of simultaneous information that can be viewed electronically, thus helping promote the paperless office and a greener planet. The concept of side-by-side documents has been around for years in the accounting profession. Printed items made document holders a necessity, but now those are a thing of the past.

Even writing this article was accomplished through the use of multiple monitors. While doing research on one monitor, I used another to write the words that appear here. The days of the single monitor are numbered, or at least relegated for less intensive use, such as for the home. Upgrading to a double-screen setup, or more, may be the single biggest step to increasing productivity that you have experienced in a long time. At that point you'll probably say, "Why didn't I do this sooner?"

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