

your life electronically

Should you store your personal information digitally and online? Here's how to weigh the risks and rewards to choose the best products and services to get started.

Writer **Brian Kramer**

Using digital and online solutions to manage your life is definitely appealing. Your important papers, family calendar, even the week's grocery list can now reside on a tiny storage device you carry with you or on a website you can access anywhere. Think about it: No more confusion at the doctor's office. Easy access to your vital information while traveling. You can even get rid of your overflowing filing cabinet. "We're at the start of a new organizing wave. People are definitely beginning to embrace electronic and digital storage options," says Kathy Jenkins, Certified Professional Organizer and president of Come to Order. "But the technologies are still evolving, and the number of options can seem overwhelming."

If you love technology and are comfortable with password-based security on websites such as *myyahoo.com* or *facebook.com*, chances are, you'll embrace managing your life electronically. For individuals with



Roamer, \$67
Life at Hand

Instant Life
Organizer, \$50
Life Link Safe

Health Tag, \$60
Jakoter

complex health situations or those who live in areas threatened by natural disaster, proper electronic storage can save lives and money. However, Jenkins is quick to point out that electronic storage is just one of many options for personal information. "You have to use the type of storage tools that work for you and your family," she says.

This next electronic wave takes two main paths: portable devices and websites. While devices vary in appearance, most are keychain-size and contain preprogrammed forms that help you gather personal, medical, and financial information. You can save scanned documents and images to most devices, then print or share your information with any computer that has a USB port, which can come in handy at your doctor's office or child's school. However, devices have proprietary forms and software, so transitioning between manufacturers and devices can be challenging.

Lifestyle management websites also store and manage personal stuff, but they're more appropriate places for organizing information that changes constantly—schedules, calendars, to-do lists—which is great for

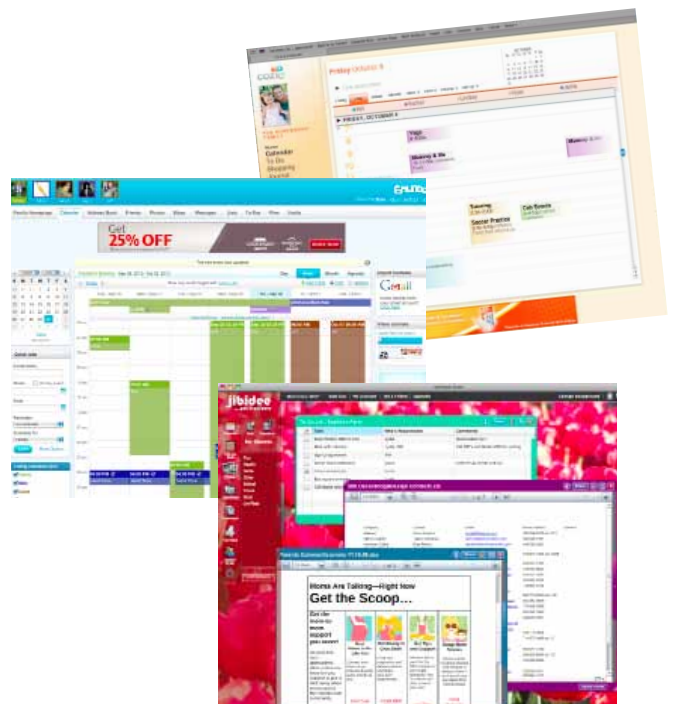
an on-the-go household. Several free websites offer decent features and some online storage space, but expect to pay a small fee to enjoy top tools and unlimited storage. You control who can access your website, and many sites offer free apps that allow you to interact with your website via your phone or other handheld device.

When you're ready to take the plunge into electronic life management, Jenkins recommends that you:

START SMALL. Pick a specific project that you can complete in 1 to 2 hours, such as loading medical information for one family member onto a portable device or one of the projects from the table, *opposite*.

ALWAYS BACK UP. Devices go missing and websites are occasionally unavailable, so store another copy of your information on an external hard drive, another USB storage device, or another reputable website.

PAY ATTENTION TO SECURITY. Manage website access with individualized passwords for each family member. Know that password-protected medical storage devices can be problematic, particularly if the owner is unable to remember or communicate the password to medical professionals at a time of emergency treatment.



Type of information	Store electronically if ...	How to store
Medical records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have a complex medical history. • You're under the care of multiple doctors. • You're young and away from parents (at camp or college, for example). • You're elderly and frequently in need of assistance. 	Save to a USB device that's easy to transport. Caregivers may want to print hard copies.
Household inventory	You live in an area prone to hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, forest fires, or earthquakes.	Save to a USB device. Store the device in a protected location, such as a safe deposit box.
Emergency contact information	Your family is mobile or frequently far from home.	Store on a password-protected area on a website that's accessible by phone or computer.
Family schedule and calendar	You have multiple family members who share information that changes constantly.	Store on a password-protected website that offers apps for remote interaction with your information.
Household maintenance calendar	You want to stay up-to-date on important household tasks.	Store on a website that allows you to send out reminder e-mails or text messages.
Address book	You frequently share and revise contact information with multiple family members.	Store on a website with easy remote access so you can track down your information from your phone.
Identification documents (birth certificates, marriage license)	You want quick access to backup copies at all times. (Many places still require hard copies of these documents.)	Save on a USB device with password protection.
To-do lists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You work on complicated, evolving projects. • You work on group projects. 	Save to a website that allows access via handheld devices so you can chart progress.
Favorites lists (books to read, movies to see, etc.)	You spend hours at video rental outlets or bookstores looking for just the right thing.	Save as a file on a personal device. No one else is likely to need access to this info.
Grocery lists and meal plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You cook frequently for large groups. • You like to plan an entire week of meals. 	Store plans and lists on a website. Encourage the entire family to add to the list.



WEBSITES TO VISIT FOR ELECTRONIC STORAGE:

Electronic storage products

- CareBinders, carebinders.com
- Jakoter, jakoterhealthorganizer.com
- Life at Hand, lifeathand.com
- Life Link Safe, lifelinksafe.com
- Organized A to Z, organizedatoz.com

Lifestyle management

- Cozi, cozi.com
- Famundo, famundo.com
- Jibidee, jibidee.com
- MyBlis, myblis.com

“Rather than organizing everything with a new electronic system, **focus on just one critical aspect or project** and see how you like it”

—Kathy Jenkins, Certified Professional Organizer and president of Come to Order