

Using Label Printers to Get Organized

By Jackie Tiani

I pretty much know the location of everything in my office, yet every shelf and drawer is neatly labeled with the location of supplies, stationery, reading and reference materials. This may seem a bit obsessive to most people. But I'm a professional organizer. For a professional organizer, putting a label on everything is regarded as pretty much normal behavior. One of the fundamental principals of organization is to designate a place for everything. Affixing a label makes it official. The payoff for me, even though I know where everything is, is that **others** are able to find what they are looking for and can figure out where to put things away. By labeling everything, my office stays organized even when I am away.

My penmanship isn't too bad, but typewritten labels are more effective for maintaining order. My clients put off making labels because using a typewriter is inconvenient. I have used and recommended both handheld and PC-connected label printers since I discovered them in the early 1990s. When used to create file folder labels and individual address labels, label printers became a remedy for procrastination.

I owned one of the first PC label printers. The print quality was a little blotchy and faded with time, but it was a huge time-saver and more effective than typing or handwriting labels. I had to change labels every time a different size was required, but having more than one printer was not possible because the printer was connected to the PC through a serial port. Even if I could physically have connected more than one label printer, doing so would probably have caused system conflicts.

PC label printers are more practical today because they connect through a USB port. Unlike serial and parallel ports, you're not likely to run short of USB connections. Three DYMO PC label printers are lined up on my desk, each loaded with different label stock (address labels, shipping labels and inserts for hanging file labels). Each of these printers gets daily use, and I now only have to change label stock when I want to use an odd-sized label.

PC-connected label printers from DYMO (owned by Esselte), Epson, and Brother generally sell for \$100 to \$250. Software with various features, like automatically printing from Outlook, Word, or Palm OS, is usually included with the purchase of a PC label printer. Most PC label printers print basic address labels and file folder labels, which are fairly inexpensive. Higher-end models are capable of printing labels up to 1½ inch in height, and up to 2.3 inches tall and may print laminated or flexible nylon labels. The larger capacity is useful for creating shipping and electronic-postage labels. CD labels are also available, but they don't cover the entire CD. If you are looking for a printer to print full-size, full-color CD labels, opt for a photo printer. Look for one without a curved paper path that has a holder for feeding CDs, and make sure you purchase CDs with a surface suitable for printing.

If you don't use labels in large quantities like I do, not only would you not need two or more PC label printers, you can probably get by with a \$25 to \$75 handheld electronic label maker from Brother, Casio, or DYMO. I use a Brother P-Touch handheld label maker, which has a QWERTY keyboard and handles labels from ¼ inch to ¾ inch in height. The handheld uses rugged laminated tape, handy for applications where the label will take some abuse. Keep in mind that although handheld label makers are reasonably priced and convenient, the laminated tape is not cheap, costing from 50 cents to \$1 a foot.



There are many uses for laminated labels. One of my favorite uses is to label AC Adapters to identify the device each goes with. We have four incoming phone lines, so I also wrap labels around each phone cord so that when it gets disconnected I know which line is which. I use the smallest size transparent labels to identify the speed dial assignments on our phones. We are middle-aged, so sometimes using a bigger label on the TV or remote control makes the controls more legible. Labeling your belongings may increase the odds that it will be returned to you if you loan it out or lose it.

Label printers have proven to be a great investment for me, both personally and professionally, by helping to simplify my live and keep me organized.