



Organizing Paperwork? Here's The One Item This Professional Organizer Wants You to Buy

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Janet Fishman, J.D. is the president & CEO of [HOPE Organizers, Inc.](#) and is a member of the [California.com Recommended Business Program](#), which highlights only the best businesses in the Golden State. To be featured, each business must be highly regarded, have a unique California story, and make a positive impact in their community.

As an expert in organization, my favorite tool for organizing paperwork and creating a filing system—besides a label maker—is a filing cabinet. This single piece of furniture provides a home for every piece of paper, making it a centralized hub for your personal and business files.

I have worked in hundreds of cabinets and found that there are several important characteristics to consider when shopping for new or used file cabinets. Whether you're looking for an office paper organizer or trying to find the right home filing

system ideas for you, these are the specifications to look for in your next filing cabinet.

9 Things to Consider Before Purchasing a Filing Cabinet in California



A filing cabinet can help you get organized by providing a space for all your important paperwork.

1. How many drawers do you need?

While there are many options to choose from—including everything from two drawer file cabinets to 14-drawer options—I personally prefer four or five drawer file cabinets that are easy to access. The drawers will fill up over time, so it's best to leave yourself extra room to grow into.

2. Would you prefer vertical or Lateral File Cabinets?

Lateral file cabinets can accommodate either legal or letter size file folders and can be utilized front-to-back or side-to-side. These are good for tight spaces, high capacity filing, and are particularly useful in office environments.

Vertical paper organizers, on the other hand, come in either legal or letter size but are not interchangeable. The vertical filing cabinet drawers are narrow but deep and great for everyday home or small business use. They take up minimal wall space and can have short or deep drawers. Keep in mind how much clearance space is available to you, as deeper drawers require more room to fully open. My preference is a letter size vertical file cabinet with deep drawers.

3. Look for file hanging rails in the drawers



Take a look inside the drawers before purchasing a file cabinet. If they have side rails, you'll be able to hang your folders without any extra work.

Make sure the drawers come with bars to hold the hanging file folders, otherwise you will have to purchase the metal file frames and insert them on your own. Before checking out, make sure each drawer of the file cabinet has all the bars because the

rails that come with a new file cabinet are generally sturdier than those that are sold separately.

If you have a used file cabinet without bars, be sure to purchase high quality file hanging rails. This will ensure the files move smoothly within the drawers. Trust me, you won't want to skimp on this.

4. What material would work best?

Not all filing cabinets are made equally, but there is a wide variety of materials available. You want to purchase a good, strong, sturdy paper organizer that will last for many years, rather than a flimsy piece that will bend, break, or be difficult to open and close.

Metal filing cabinets are the most popular, are made from galvanized steel, and are very durable—though many people don't consider them very attractive. Regardless, they are typically long-lasting and can come in different colors to match a room's decor.

There are also laminate file cabinets—which are made of laminate-covered particle board and resemble real wood—along with more expensive solid wood file cabinets. These wood file cabinets look great and blend into rooms like any traditional piece of furniture, but add the functionality of paper storage drawers.

5. Should you invest in a fireproof file cabinet?

Fireproof file cabinets are specially formulated with insulation-proof materials that protect against fire as well as the water from sprinkler systems. Since they can guard your documents against these potential disasters, they're well-worth the extra expense, especially in regions of California that are prone to wildfires.

6. Does it matter if the file cabinet locks?



Investing in a filing cabinet that locks is always a good idea. Whether for future use or resale value, locks always come in handy.

It is a good idea to get a lockable filing cabinet. It's an extremely important feature if you have to abide by HIPAA requirements or retain confidential tenant or employee paperwork. If you don't immediately need the locks, you can tape the keys inside or outside of the file cabinet, but don't throw the keys away. Even if you don't personally need to use the lock, it's a good feature for resale value.

7. Opt for an anti-tip filing cabinet

Invest in a file cabinet that has anti-tip features to prevent the unit from tipping over. Generally, anti-tip means you won't be able to open a drawer when another one is open. While it can take some getting used to if you haven't interacted with one in the past, the peace of mind is worth the adjustment period.

8. Determine how much space you have for your paper storage



Place your filing cabinet in an accessible spot so you will actually use it.

To make sure your chosen file cabinet will fit in its designated spot, measure the height, width, and depth of the space. Then, compare those measurements to the file cabinets you're considering purchasing.

When thinking about where to store your file cabinet, think about how accessible the spot is. Since you want your new paper file organizer to be a useful command center for all your papers, choosing the right location is vital.

9. Find the best way to organize your paper files

When you search for a file, you want to be able to locate it without much difficulty. You shouldn't spend hours looking for an important bill or contract, making organization pivotal. Your time is valuable, so make sure you don't thoughtlessly throw all of your paperwork into the file cabinet. It's typically best to categorize your files and folders in a file cabinet so you can retrieve any document easily. Doing so also increases the level of security, which is especially important when storing sensitive information.

A file cabinet is one of the best investments you can make, and it will last for a long time. Remember, the furniture in your office ought to improve your workflow—not distract you from being productive—so committing to a filing system is a great place

to start. In addition to organizing files, using a file cabinet can help avoid future issues, including the possibility of your documents being wiped out during a natural disaster. You can't control what will happen in the future, but you can prepare and get organized. So, determine what your requirements are and go find your ideal filing cabinet.

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