

# Tackling the Mail Pile

By Sarah Welch and Alicia Rockmore



Do you have a sense of dread when you open your mailbox? Not just because of bills, but also because of everything else that's in there with the bills. Mail is like a weed, if you don't keep it in check, it will spread out and eventually take over any and all empty tables, countertops, and chairs you've got. The consequences can be more than just clutter, too. The National Association of Professional Organizers estimates that 25% of Americans pay their bills late because they can't find them. To make things even more difficult, postal workers delivered nearly 101 billion pieces of bulk mail in 2005, a 12 percent increase from two years ago. It was the first year that bulk mail exceeded first-class mail. Strange to think there was actually a time when we waited excitedly for the mail to come, hoping for a letter or magazine. Fortunately, there are ways to stop fearing, and maybe even start anticipating, the mail again.

## Alicia on "Recycling the Junk"

"When you first glance at the pile of mail you get on a daily basis, it already looks imposing. If you do a quick sorting of the pile, though, you can weed out the junk that makes up a majority of the mail. Keep a recycling bin next to where you keep your mail, and immediately toss all the unwanted catalogs, fliers, subscription offers, sweepstakes entry forms, charity solicitations, credit offers, advertising supplements, and whatever else they can drum up. You can be environmentally conscious, while also shrinking your mail pile."

## Sarah on "Opting Out"

"One of the easier ways to get a handle on your mail pile is to reduce the amount of mail you get in the first place. A good way to remove your name from several national mailing lists at once by signing up for the Direct Marketing Association's Mail Preference Service at [www.dmaconsumers.org/offmailinglist.html](http://www.dmaconsumers.org/offmailinglist.html). This Web site provides instructions on how to register (a \$1 processing fee is charged). This service is only for national, not local, mail and only for residential, not business, addresses and is good for five years."

**Here are a few simple steps to getting your countertops free of mail piles.**

### 1. Create a Sorting System

The best way to organize your mail is by getting an organizer. Start by getting a mail holder with three compartments. Make compartment #1 for bills, #2 for correspondence and #3 for things that need action (e.g. forms to mail back, coupons you want to use later in the week). It's amazing how manageable the mail suddenly becomes when it's broken down into its contents.

### 2. Make "Sorting Time"

Pick a time every day (before you leave for work in the am or before you turn on the TV at night) and take a few short minutes to sort the mail into the compartments we mentioned above. Once you've done that, pick a day each week (same day/time) to go through and pay the bills, answer any correspondence, put invitations into calendar, and whatever action-oriented things you need to do. That way you can start with a clean slate the following week.



### 3. Magazines/Catalogs

Magazines and catalogs take up an enormous amount of space in your mail. No matter how much you may like getting all of them, there comes a time when you need to recognize whether you really need all of them. If there is a magazine you get but never have time to read, cancel your subscription. If there's a catalog you used to like but haven't ordered from for a while, contact them and request to be off their mailing list. You can always re-subscribe, but why waste money, and paper, on things you always throw out.

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*We are the co-founders of Buttoned Up, inc., a company dedicated to helping stretched and stressed women get themselves organized (along with everybody else they're responsible for too!). We welcome your thoughts! Please send ideas and questions to us at: [yourlife@getbuttonedup.com](mailto:yourlife@getbuttonedup.com) or visit us at [www.getbuttonedup.com](http://www.getbuttonedup.com)*