TAMING AND NAVIGATING YOUR INFORMATION JUNGLE

You see an interesting article and save it to read later. A colleague shares a conference paper with a great description of a procedure; you save it.

Three more articles, four more book chapters and you are adrift in a sea of papers, a computer or cloud account full of non-descriptive PDF file names or a combination of both.

Your well-intentioned saving of information to read or refer to later threatens to overwhelm you.

You need simple, free options for organization.

Managing Citations and Files

Think through why you save information; there are a variety of citation programs designed to assist you in organizing, storing and adding value to the articles you save. These programs—designed to organize information, collect it from websites/indexes/databases and format it in word-processing programs—are usually called citation management software. These programs have become sophisticated and can be daunting to those who aren’t naturally drawn to tinkering with technology.

All the programs will have features you don’t need or use immediately. Choose one that does what you need, and initially only use those features. Later, you can learn additional features or move your data to a different program.

Five Key Points on Deciding How to Organize Your Files

Why are you keeping the article?

You have not read it yet. It is an update to a topic you follow and keep a file about. It has a specific piece of information (great illustration, procedure description, fact) that you want to be able to locate, refer back to and maybe cite. Someone else suggested or requires it (class reading, board study, journal club). You write and present and want to keep it for later use.

Storage Format Versus Reading Format

It is simple with common technology to convert between print and electronic formats. Take a moment to think about which way you want to store items as a separate thought from how you prefer to read them.

Just because you receive an article in print doesn’t mean you keep it in print. We often scan articles and convert them to PDFs to read on a tablet, phone or e-reader. Conversely, just because you receive a PDF doesn’t mean we always keep it as such. We often print items to read and annotate.

Interactive Reading Versus Passive Reading

We read articles differently at different times; it depends on our purpose.

You may read something first to see if it is of interest. You read it again and then interact with it and personalize it by highlighting or making notes so that it has additional value later. Depending on your work style, you can personalize it on paper and scan that copy to store electronically, personalize an electronic copy using a variety of e-reading programs or personalize the entry about the article in a citation management program.

How you interact with it may influence how you store the article, so it’s worth thinking through.

One Location or Many Locations

Depending on your working style, you may be most comfortable storing your articles in all one place. You also need to consider if you want to be able to access them from more than one location or on more than one device.

Individual Use or Sharing

Do you work alone or collaborate? If you work alone, the decision about what citation management software to use is yours alone. If you collaborate, you have a shared decision to make—which software allows you to collaborate best for your collective work style and other constraints such as differences in workplaces and security protocols.

In the next issue, we will provide a beginner’s guide to citation management programs.

NEW RESOURCE ALERT

RCVS Knowledge has a new free journal watch, InFocus, to support evidence in practice. Produced by RCVS Knowledge’s Library and Information Service, it is delivered bimonthly by email, summarizes important and practice-critical articles and includes the bottom line for implementation for practice.

All relevant veterinary journals are watched, with articles assessed and scored against a rubric by a clinical review team. Top-scoring articles are reviewed, summarized and have commentary added.

The list of journals they watch and the first two issues are at http://www.infocus.rvc.org.


Do you need a full copy of an article? A literature search? Economic facts and figures about veterinary practice? Animal owner demographics and spending patterns? Texas veterinarians may contact the Medical Sciences Library at Texas A&M University for assistance at no cost for reference service, literature searching and copies of articles, chapters and conference papers from our collection. Details can be found at http://guides.library.tamu.edu/tvvetalum.