How to set your Mac up for productivity



Matt Rivier

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Photo by Kevin Bhagat on Unsplash

This is the first of a series of articles on the way I set my Technology environment up to organise productivity/work and personal life and keep them separate. In this first article, the goal is to create the best work environment on your laptop, make it distraction-free. We will get started with the main visual aspects of your laptop before to dive deeper into the way I interact with my computer and use it.

Set the Menu Bar, Dock & Touch Bar for productivity

You will here see how the visual aspects of my laptop are set up and might differ from what you are used to with a mac. I will also take the time to explain each of my choices.

The Menu Bar

Picture 1. Matt's Menu Bar

While there is an option to automatically hide-show the menu bar I find myself using it a lot for (time, changing audio source…). I thus decided to keep it shown. Plus when working in full screen which we will talk about more a bit later, the menu bar automatically hides to take away any distractions.

So this is not going to take to much time considering the only real part to customise is the right part of the menu bar where

you can select the icon shortcuts of the functionalities you use the most, I still have a few recommendations and tips. You can see that mine is quite minimal. I really thought about the icons I used the most and only kept those:

- **The Search (Spotlight) icon**: Well while I would have gladly got rid of this one, it is currently not possible without third-party apps such as Bartender3. Although this alternative adds one more app to your laptop and eats quite a bit of ram which is in my case not possible. (you can access the Spotlight Bar with the ***CMD + SPACE*** shortcut)
- **The Volume icon**: can be turned on/off in System Preferences in the sound panel at the bottom (see picture 1.a). Which I mainly use to switch between my AirPods and my Speaker.

Picture 1.a — Show volume in menu Bar

- **The Date icon**: Pretty Self-explanatory but I mainly use it to keep track of the time in my day. (it is turned on by default but you can click on it and then press "Open Date & Time Preferences" button to turn it off/edit it if needed.
- **The Battery icon**: Again, this is quite self-explanatory although you will note I turned the percentages off as I think it is useless information knowing that your mac automatically warns you when you reach 5% of battery left (See picture 1.b — Talk about a coincidence, the icon showed up exactly while writing this part). (If you want to do the same, click on the battery icon and then click on the "Show Percentage" button which will hide the percentage).

Picture 1.b No Battery Left

- **The Wifi Icon**: I thought about hiding this one multiple times, but it is very useful anytime your wifi cuts and you need to do a hotspot with your phone.

- **Notification Center Icon**: This one is similar to the Spotlight icon in the sense that I do not use it and cannot remove it from the menu bar. Although there's a neat shortcut that you have access to by using the following shortcut: ***OPT-NotificationCenter Icon*** which allows you to turn DO NOT DISTURB on. So here it is, if you ever looked for it now you know how to activate it.

And this will be it for the menu bar. I do want to precise that there are way more options to choose from in the System Preferences. These are the ones I use but adapt this part to suit your needs.

The Dock:



Picture 2. The Dock

My Dock is usually hidden and hear me out here, I know a lot of people are reluctant to try it on, it takes something away from the Mac right? Well, I felt the same way for the longest time. I

kept the dock there taking a lot of my precious screen estate just because it's a part of the mac. A friend of mine told me to try to hide the dock for a day and see if I liked it. I could always put it back afterwards so I did. Hiding it for a day, I realised that I did not even use the dock that much. And it freed soo much of my screen it felt like having a new laptop, and I truly would not be able to go back.

There are four main different things about my dock.



Picture 2.a — Dock Settings

1. I deactivated the Magnification on my dock. And the main reason is efficiency/optimisation. The Magnification takes a consequent amount of resources while in use.

2. As talked about above, my dock automatically hides. Now you know how to try it on too 🙃. (don't hesitate to tell me if it worked for you)
3. I turned off the recent applications in Dock because I found it to be distracting. Furthermore, using the spotlight to open most apps apart from the few in my dock, the need for this feature becomes useless (Plus I usually forget which temporary apps are in my dock so its faster to use Spotlight).
4. (Picture 2) — I only keep apps I use on a daily basis in the dock (System Preferences is usually not there, it is just opened). Terminal and Atom, the two apps on the right, left of the System Preferences, are the two main apps I use for work (I'm a developer). Then Messages (for which the notifications are turned off — Explained further), and safari. I deleted any other app from the dock — because **I do not use them**.

I talk about my usage of the downloads folder in the next part. Also, please empty your bin/Trash can, however, you call it. It too slows your computer down…

The Touch Bar (MacBook Pro Only):



Picture 2.b The Touch Bar

The only thing I changed here was to take the Siri button out

and put the lock one instead as you can always summon Siri with "Hey Siri".

The way the interactions are set up on my Laptop

So we have seen the main visual aspects of my laptop, and the reasons behind each choice. Now let's take a look at the less obvious things. And discover how notifications are your worst enemy.

The Desktop:

This is just a personal opinion but I find having anything on my desktop distracting, this is why I never leave anything there and have an organised system in the documents part of my mac. (and yes it does slow your computer down to have files on your desktop. Although, unless if you have gigabytes of data there it won't really matter.)

The Download Folder:

I again keep the least amount of files in this folder as well. But if I do have anything I do need to address soon, this is where it will reside (no duplicates), because it will be in my view and extremely easy to access from the dock. I do know people who keep a TON of files in their download folder (often duplicates) because it takes time to order it. This is a bad practice. If you

use Spotlight a lot or open documents from Word, Pages or whatever app you use, this will inevitably lead to confusion thinking you lost data when you re-open the wrong file. So if you are going to keep a lot of files in your downloads folder make sure that you do not have any duplicates.

note that we are here talking about not keeping two versions of the same file you are currently editing. Having backups on older files is although a good thing.

The Notifications (Or lack thereof):

Picture 3. Notifications and Do Not Disturb.

And this is where I really go against the grain. I use my laptop as a productivity tool and thus think of any non-essential notification as an unnecessary distraction.

There are three main different things about my notifications/Do not disturb:

1. My Do Not disturb is turned on. While I never had problems with my mac bothering at those times (which are delimiting my working hours), I turn it on just in case I forget to turn my mac off at night.
2. It is always nice to know you won't be disturbed during an important presentation or meeting 😉. Game changer right, it was for me.
3. As you can see most of my notifications are turned off ESPECIALLY MESSAGES. I only use my computer for work. I am fortunate enough to have an iPad. I thus divide my devices in work / personal categories: (phone, iPad: personal life — MacBookPro: pro-Life). My brain is thus already prepared to work when I take the laptop out of its case and turn it on in the morning. If someone really needs to contact me, the calls are on my laptop, and I will check the messages on my phone when I pick it up during my next break. (same for social media — I only have my accounts on my phone).

About the way you use documents folder and iCloud:

I personally have been using iCloud for about 2–3 years. It helps me have any file that I might need anywhere and allows me to have a piece of mind if I ever happen to lose access to my laptop for whatever reason.

While this is very personal and up to you to find what works for you. I strongly encourage you to create an easy system to classify your files on your laptop. In this way, and if the system that you created works for your usage, you should only rarely have to helplessly look through your laptop's files to find the one you need.

My Documents folder is divided into two categories:

1. Personal
2. Project

The personal category contains my Diplomas, Backups, Finances… Basically, anything that is not related to my current work. Although, everything is classified by category.

The Project category contains all of my current projects I work on. (logic I know! The easier your organisation is, the easier you will find your files)

About the Full-Screen Mode

You might have already noticed that there are three buttons in the top left corner of each app, the red one to close the

application, yellow to minimise it, and the green to "Enter full-screen".

There are a few advantages to using the full-screen mode. Let's tackle the most obvious one first: It gives you more screen estate and hides both the dock and the menu bar. But this is actually not the main reason I have grown adept of using my apps in full screen. In fact, you might know about Desktops already (sliding three fingers up by default will give you a view of the ones opened at the top)



Picture 4: View of your desktops

1. You can here see I have two desktops on my laptop at the moment. The main desktop and Microsoft Teams which is an app opened in full screen. The main benefit of having

desktops is the ease of switching from one to the other, a THREE FINGER SWIPE (LEFT OR RIGHT) allows you to switch desktop, making referencing a document super easy.

2. You can also add desktops manually, they will work similarly to if you opened them from making an app full screen. I do use this functionality less, but your mileage may vary.

We are getting very close to the end here, you should now be a productivity Jedi.

Last words:

I also always turn my laptop off at night. It doesn't hurt your laptop, and certainly does not hurt you! I feel that it allows me to take a break from work for the night as well as being able to start my day on a fresh new page, rather than already having 10 different opened apps I've been using within the past weeks. (Same thing try it and see if it works for you! It did for me)

I hope you enjoyed this article and that you've learned some useful tips for reading it. I will publish similar articles for my phone and other devices.

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