

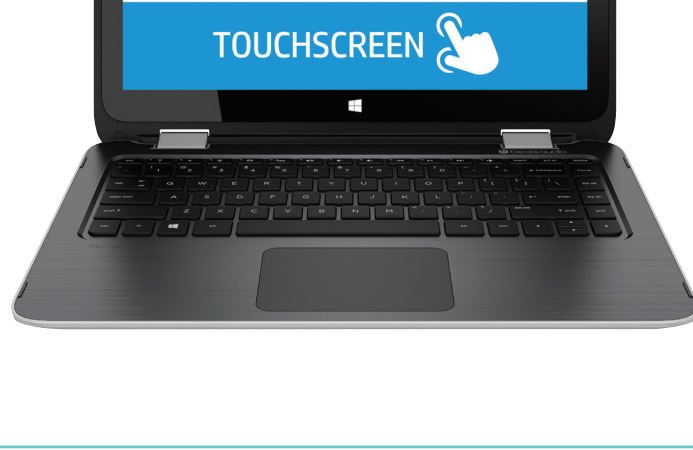
7 Splurge-Worthy Office Essentials

By Fred Decker

Managing your budget isn't simply a question of finding low-cost alternatives for the things you need. The reality is more nuanced, and getting the maximum return on your investment sometimes requires strategic, creative thinking. Look around your office for a few minutes each day, and ask yourself where a premium product could improve efficiency or eliminate problems. To illustrate the thought process involved, we've prepared a list of seven office essentials we consider splurge-worthy.

1. Portable Power

Modern, top-quality tablets conceal the full power of a desktop computer beneath high-definition screens, packing the potential to make you a star in the boardroom or at sales presentations. Windows-based tablets add the ability to work with your existing software, so even businesses with limited IT resources can integrate them seamlessly. Alternatively, for the ultimate in portable power, consider a "convertible." Use it as a touchscreen laptop at the office or a tablet on the go.



2. Really Good Coffee

Whether you think of it as a way to stay mentally sharp, a nicety for customers or your own daily moment of self-indulgence, there's no substitute for really good coffee. Skip the traditional pots and brewers, and invest in a good-quality single-cup coffee maker. The best models brew multiple cup sizes, to accommodate your favorite mug, and have large, easy-to-drain reservoirs so fresh water is always available. You'll save space, eliminate waste and have a cup of fresh, perfect coffee — or tea, herbal tea or hot chocolate — whenever you want it.



3. Creature Comforts

It might not be the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of productivity, but your office chair is one of the most important purchases you'll make. The physical comfort provided by a well-designed chair isn't just a sensory pleasure. Its infinitely adjustable height and angles help reduce physical fatigue after long hours of use, and this in turn keeps you feeling energized as the day wears on. If you find yourself groaning and stretching by mid-afternoon, it's time to prioritize a seating upgrade.



4. Legible Labels

Your office suite, graphics software and laser printers make you look good on paper, but not everything can go through a printer. For everything else, invest in an office labeler. These compact machines print labels in a staggering range of fonts and color combinations, matching the rest of your print materials in appearance and quality. At your own desk, the crisp legibility of P-Touch labels makes files and file folders quicker and easier to identify, saving time and improving your personal efficiency.



5. Storage, Storage, Storage

You can never have too much storage, for backing up crucial programs or archiving documents and financial data. For daily backups, invest in large, fast external drives that use USB 3.0 for data transfer. It's up to 10 times faster than USB 2.0, so you can back up far more computers at any given time. For sensitive or proprietary data, take things a step further and select a drive with hardware-based data encryption. The drive itself secures your data, so you can back up computers with multiple operating systems on the same drive.



6. Serious Surge Protection

Your business is filled with electrical devices, from the break room microwave to the telephones and computers on desks, so one ill-timed storm or transformer failure could cost you heavily. High-quality surge protected strips break the circuit when your power spikes and filters out potentially troublesome electromagnetic and radio frequency interference. The best models offer a combination of switched and always-on outlets, respond to less-damaging surges — measured in joules, and lower are better — and also protect your phone. Many manufacturers back their strips with connected-equipment warranties, pledging to replace hundreds of thousands of dollars in equipment if their surge protectors fail.



7. It's In the Cards

In fast-moving, fast-growing businesses, it's sometimes hard to keep up with the demand for business cards. New hires and recently promoted personnel can write their names or new titles on already printed cards, but that solution — however pragmatic — lacks the appearance of professionalism. Good-quality blank cards for self-printing make a better alternative for those awkward times when you're waiting for permanent cards from your printing company. The best brands have very fine perforations, giving a clean edge when separated. Some are also printable on both sides, so you can perfectly replicate a double-sided company card.



The value of a list like this doesn't lie in its specific suggestions, though we think they're well chosen. Its real benefit comes from applying that kind of analysis to your own operations, and asking yourself what purchases can generate the maximum tangible or intangible payback. Once you've identified those priorities, Office Depot will be here to help you put them into practice.