

Architecture & Design

paper eater

In today's hyper-digital world, why is there more clutter than ever? From business cards to marriage certificates, one machine can simplify it all.



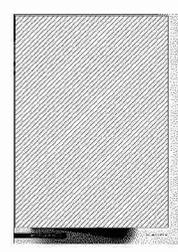
BYTE SIZE
 The Fujitsu ScanSnap S500 makes quick digital work of any document, \$495; shopfujitsu.com.

tiny ScanSnap—not much wider than a single sheet of paper—devours nearly 20 pages a minute, instantly turning them into full-color PDF files. Equipped with two image sensors, the machine scans both sides of a page at once and automatically adjusts itself to the size of each sheet, ignoring blank pages while welcoming staples, rips, and wrinkles. Tattered bills from forgotten hotels, 20-year-old ticket stubs (don't ask), even an ancient, gnarled Social Security card are all restored to digital perfection. The character recognition software that comes free with the scanner—ReadIris—captures text with unflinching accuracy.

Marriage certificates, birth certificates, report cards, divorce decrees: Digitize them all. Next time you come home with a briefcase full of business cards, run them through the machine and throw them away. The ScanSnap will place them directly into your contact database. If you really want to get your geek on, do what I have done: Scan your papers and then send the PDFs to your Gmail account. (You do have Gmail, right? Nearly three gigabytes of storage should hold you for the next few hundred years.) If you ever need to refer to an old colonoscopy report, say, or find a Key lime pie recipe, simply sign on to Gmail, search for any word in the document, and retrieve it in two seconds.

If you own a Mac, you can plunge even further into the digital abyss: ScanSnap syncs with DEVONthink, perhaps the most successful artificial intelligence software for home users. DEVONthink, by itself, can open, organize, assess, and store any document that passes through the scanner. Just create and name a database—Coffee, for example—and the program will take any scanned document, read it, and file it in a fully searchable form. You can find all the lattes you ever bought at Starbucks and arrange them by size or the date you bought them. It's actually a little freaky.

And so is the vast expanse of emptiness on my desk. No more stacks of papers to work through—just bytes and digits safely off in cyberspace. And those empty cabinet drawers? They are filling up fast with Ethernet cables, network hubs, and an extra hard drive. There are also a couple of BlackBerries and a remote control or two. After all, how much stuff can a guy throw out?—MICHAEL SPETER



When it comes to gadgets, I have no bottom line. My hall closet might as well be an exhibit from a museum of technological pathology: It is strewn with the shards of dead CD players, Walkmen, Psions, PalmPilots, Treos, even iPods. There are circuit boards, modems, cameras, and adapter plugs from countries I have never visited. I am perhaps the only person who embraced an assignment to cover a war in part because it forced my bosses to buy me a satellite phone.

But has any of that actually improved my life? Have I ever owned one piece of machinery that I just could not live without?

Absolutely: my **Fujitsu ScanSnap S500**. What—you don't have a ScanSnap? It's not shiny or sleek enough? At \$495, the ScanSnap costs nearly twice as much as most other scanners, and it definitely won't impress women. ("Scanner" is probably the least arousing word in the English language.) But isn't it time to expand the meaning of the gadget? A month ago I had four *full* filing cabinets: tax documents, recipes, yellowing magazine articles I would probably never read, letters, bills, warranties, instruction manuals—the usual detritus of modern life. Now my wastebasket is the only thing I own that is stuffed with paper. I simply plugged the ScanSnap into a USB port on my laptop and started to drop papers into the chute. Pages instantly began to run through the machine with a gentle whir, and the rest was digital magic.

Whereas most scanners are cumbersome and slow, the