

OmniFocus: A Different Testimonial

This is a tale of woe and the panacea that is OmniFocus. Well, not really, but it caught your attention, didn't it?

My name is Sascha, and I am a writer, both of fiction and other stuff including marketing texts and documentation. I also suffer from a dissociative disorder, not to be mistaken for Dissociative Personality Disorder which is a pretty controversial topic among psychiatrists – dissociations itself aren't. In addition, I am Swiss and English is only my third or fourth language (depending on how you count), so please bear with me and my droll language pragmatics in the course of this text.

Dissociative. What does it mean? In short: I hallucinate and have blackouts. When I'm having a really bad fit, I completely lose touch with reality and embrace the warm shores of psychosis. Quite a few people have such a disorder, and the triggers vary. In my case, the main trigger is stress in the broadest sense of the word.

I think you can already guess where this is leading. I also hear you say "Yay! Hallucinations without the use of illegal drugs!" but believe me, the last thing you want is to see pulsing, purple question marks all over the place when sitting in a customer meeting with three bigwigs. Well, okay, it depends on the bigwigs in question. But I digress.

Stress can mean anything from pressing deadlines to emotional distress to reading bad ad copies to having my phone ring. Anti-psychotic drugs can help, also tranquilisers and even muscle relaxation according to that dude called Jacobson, but what works best for me is to lower the inherent stress levels. To accomplish that last bit, it is necessary for me to get rid of all the crap that occupies my brain cells, pronto. You know. Tasks, obligations, weird ideas you have at 3am, pretty much everything.

Now, I have never read Allen's book but naturally I also tried out all sorts of task management programs and brain-dump software. Nothing really worked for me ... I stuck the longest with iGTD but the application got more and more complex and intimidating with each release and I ended up using it as a mere keeper of my anthology deadlines.

Enter OmniFocus.

I find it easy to just stick everything that's on my mind into the inbox to be reviewed later on. QuickEntry helps a lot, also Clippings (Mail clippings especially). Writing a short-story, one of those thoughts enters my mind, press the shortcut, write it down, forget about it.

OmniFocus was the first application that made me understand the concept of "contexts", I should mention. The "No Context" inbox helped a lot – when entering a new activity, I often can't

decide what context it belongs to and having all those tasks in one handy box later on is *very* handy. Hardcore GTD acolytes will probably kill me for this statement. Anyway.

The real über-feature for me, though, was the way OmniFocus deals with active projects and “next actions”. No longer do I have all my upcoming tasks on the screen, just those I need to worry about *right now*.

You see, I live in two countries. One day I suddenly realise I need to find a tax attorney in that other country, and as I won’t be there until next year, I can just jot it down and forget about it. OmniFocus will remind me of that activity soon enough. One piece out of my mind that would have put me through panic attacks at night because I *simply couldn’t afford to forget about it*. Which I now can, without having to worry where the hell I put that piece of paper I wrote it on.

The result? I was a lot calmer after using OmniFocus for a couple of days. Now, some two weeks later, my brain feels almost ... empty. No pressure, nothing that swirls around my mind trying to catch my attention, it’s all written down in one place where I can choose to see what I want to see with a few clicks of the mouse. No waking up at 3am with thoughts about the Christmas card list. No worrying in the mornings what the hell I am supposed to work on right now, and thus getting all jittery and wound up. It’s all there, in a handsome and hugely usable package that’s easy enough to understand immediately but powerful enough to cater for complex needs.

So, did OmniFocus cure me? Na, I won’t go as far as that. But it made the life of this one dissociative person that much more bearable. My psychiatrist would call it a “skill” I suppose: something that supports me through an attack, or even better – helps me such attacks don’t occur all that often.

So I guess this is a Thank You. I could have kept the testimonial a lot shorter with those two words only, but hey. Sometimes, rambling is fun.

Sascha Erni, writer (Switzerland and Germany)