

Can I Undo That? 25 Mistakes You Should Avoid

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"A man who has committed a mistake and doesn't correct it is committing another mistake" ~Confucius

Admitting our technology mistakes can make us better users and ultimately more successful when engaging with technology. Here are the top 25 mistakes made by many genealogists (including myself) that everyone can learn something from.



Software and Hardware

1. Using just one family tree software program.

While you might have a favorite software program to keep your family tree, there are terrific features across all of the programs. Consider breaking up your family tree databases to ensure you can use them between various software programs to take advantage of the best features from each.

2. Thinking I could “write a book” with a button.

Software programs might easily be able to generate a series of reports that can be bound and placed on a bookshelf, but that is not true genealogical writing. Writing family history should include terrific stories, photos, and analysis of research materials – software can't easily share *how* something was found or *why* a conclusion has been reached.

3. Waiting too long to take a class on photo editing software.

Having access to so many materials in digital format provides more than just wider access to documents for genealogist. Learning how to effectively use a program like *Adobe Photoshop* to embed citations, enhance, repair photos, etc., is a tremendous asset for every genealogist.

4. Not using audio and video sooner.

With Skype, YouTube, and so many other tools to capture audio and video, it is easy to record research results visually, gather family stories and memories, and share your findings with the world.

5. Not having a sync plan.

Syncing between various devices, from tablets to desktops is an essential part of using today's technology. Just as you should keep a consistent backup regiment, maintain a system to share essential family history files between various devices.

6. Just using apps for their advertised purpose.

Many of the best tools for genealogists, including Trello <<http://www.trello.com>>, ToDoist <<http://www.todist.com>>, and Evernote <<http://www.evernote.com>> take a while to be discovered, as they are specifically marketing towards those working on their family history. When new apps are released, take time to search for ways they might be applied for genealogical research.

7. Relying too much on user reviews.

While the web provides a vast amount of reviews and opinions, it can be easy to be persuaded by an online review of a product without really understanding the individual posting the review. Search the past history of reviewers before making their words a crucial point of your decision-making.

Online

8. Just using online trees to store data.

While the fear of placing "all my genealogy online" is often prevalent, not using online trees as research tools can hinder your research. Automated matching and hinting services, interactive timelines, and other technologies might not always be 100% accurate, but they can unearth some incredible documents.

9. Using the same email address for everything.

From the very beginning, message board postings to RootsWeb <<http://www.rootsweb.org>> and other similar locations could be made with a dedicated genealogy email address to cut down on SPAM and help keep your personal profile more protected.

10. Not keeping a research log online.

As a genealogist the research pathways you leave are nearly as important as your final conclusion. Use a blog to share your research process as well as the final findings rather than wait until you are "done" with researching a particular individual or family.

11. Limiting myself to a single online subscription.

While there are some large 'powerhouse' genealogy websites, exclusive deals and other arrangements force you to constantly evaluate your online

subscription lists. Smaller players might have key datasets for specific projects or locations you research, and should not be overlooked.

12. Subscribing to everything.

There are dozens of potential online subscriptions, though not all can help you in your research. While a couple of subscriptions are necessary, you do not always have to subscribe to everything. Watch for automatic renewals and unfriendly terms and conditions.

13. Being scared of eBay.

While the online auction powerhouse seemed to not be an appropriate resource for genealogy, it remains an intriguing and potential goldmine for genealogical finds. Family bibles, letters, books, and other materials often pop up unexpectedly on eBay (enough that a scheduled search alert can be extremely useful).

14. Trying to build and maintain my own personal family history website.

The skills needed to operate and maintain a personal family history website require more than that of an average genealogist. Instead of building something from scratch, consider using a cloud-based or community service to share your own genealogy online.

15. Forgetting the local public library.

Beyond library editions of popular family history services, local public libraries offer many subscriptions only available to institutions (and great services for locating books and articles through interlibrary loan).

16. Ignoring digital collections from state archives.

Because they are not often easily found through a search engines like Google, digital collections from state archives can easily be missed. Spending some time navigating through a state archive's website can lead to undiscovered databases and other resources.

17. Relying upon search engines.

Not every site has an extensive search engine or advanced search capabilities. It is easy to forget to browse rather than search when looking at websites – particularly those created by smaller, private organizations that have incredibly rich content buried behind links.

18. Lamenting and being unprepared for changes to my favorite websites.

In order to thrive, the most successful technologies – from software to digital portals has to change and adapt with new advancements. It is unrealistic to expect that your favorite family history site will never update its homepage or search engine. Take time to learn, listen, and adapt to changes – sign-up for beta groups and get ahead of the curve rather than be caught off guard.

Best Practices

19. Tossing old user manuals, installation disks, and outdated technology.

While the technology might not be accessible, having access to an old floppy disk or zip disk drive can come in handy every once in awhile. In addition, having the ability to install outdated software can be a benefit in certain circumstances.

20. Not converting file formats when new software is released.

Genealogists create thousands of files as they conduct their work. When new versions of software programs are released, and file formats change, it is essential to quickly convert old files to the new format (especially those files not currently in use).

21. Never labeling digital pictures.

Files full of "DSN0045.jpg" can quickly turn into genealogical disasters. Add metadata to your photos and develop (and follow) a naming process for your digital pictures.

22. Ignoring "sent items" and attachments when preserving emails.

Email programs will often offer services to regularly backup your inbox and other key folders. It is also essential to keep copies of the messages you have sent for genealogical purposes as well as any attachments (documents, GEDCOMs, etc.) that have been sent to you, as these are not always automatically included.

23. Not backing up always and often.

Creating a thorough and consistent backup schedule is essential. This should include files located on cloud-based services such as Dropbox, and as much of an online family tree as is possible. In addition, it is important to test your backups as well (a backup that you cannot restore is not helpful at all).

24. Forgetting the L.O.C.K.S.S principle

The L.O.C.K.S.S. principle (Lots of Copies Keep Stuff Safe) runs far beyond digital files. From paper documents to originals, creating and correctly storing documents is incredibly essential. Learn more at <http://www.lockss.org/>.

25. Ditching the desktop computer.

The attraction of a lightweight, fast and portable laptop computer was too much to handle for a while. The benefits of a large screen and a solid workstation can pay off – especially when browsing through millions of unindexed images online.