Get Organized!
...with Dropbox

A Step-By-Step Guide for Making Dropbox Part of Your Organizational Arsenal

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Your relationship with Dropbox may be much like mine. I had read good things about it. I created an account. After all, it's free. The part that was missing was…I didn't really use it.

While our digital world gives us more ways to store things, it also gives us more places to *lose* things...quite a doubled-edged sword. In addition, everything we add to our system increases complexity. "Free" is not free if it leads us to the land of "overwhelmed."

When I figured out how to incorporate Dropbox into what was already a well-designed file structure on my computer, it immediately moved front and center to be a productivity tool I use every day.

This short guide is designed to get you up and running with Dropbox, and do so in one sitting.

Create Your Account

Go to Dropbox.com. Click the download button, and follow the on-screen instructions to install Dropbox and create your account.

Go to your other computers and log into your account. Download Dropbox to those computers as well.

The site is surprisingly user-friendly. You will see information on how to download Dropbox to your mobile devices. You will even see how you can get extra storage for free by introducing friends to Dropbox!

Before Dropbox, if you looked at my computer desktop, you would have seen three folders.

My Documents is like the metal filing cabinet which houses all of our reference folders. Open it, and you would see an array of folders labeled by subject. In fact, the naming configuration of the closely parallel the naming configuration of the paper folders in my metal filing cabinet.
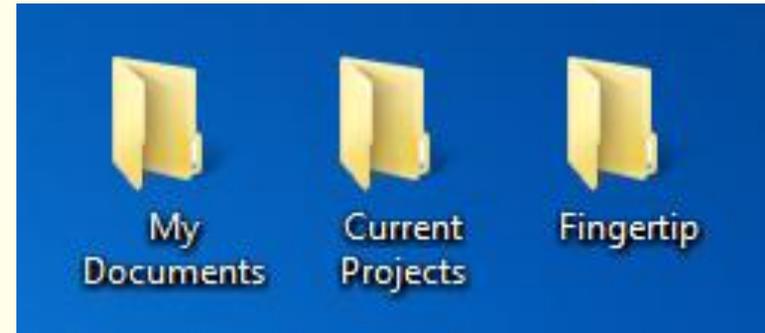
Current Projects is where I store everything that is a "work in progress." Just opening the folder serves as a reminder of what is on my plate.

Fingertip files are those few files I use a great deal and want to literally have *at my fingertips*. Letterhead, a financial spreadsheet, or a meeting planning form are three examples of items in my Fingertip files.

You probably know that Dropbox provides 2GB of free storage. You may also know that by introducing enough friends to Dropbox, you can increase your amount of free storage up to 8GB.

What if you have more to store than the amount available to you in your Dropbox account? You will have to choose the "paid" account option, or you must make some decisions about what you store in Dropbox and what you don't. I am doing just fine with the free option.

For me, I don't necessarily want to have *all* of my files available from everywhere. I *do* want to be able to access my *Current Projects* from anywhere. Since those files represent work in progress, having access to them from *anywhere* means being able to make progress from *anywhere*.

I also want to have access to my *Fingertip* files from anywhere since they are the files I reference most.
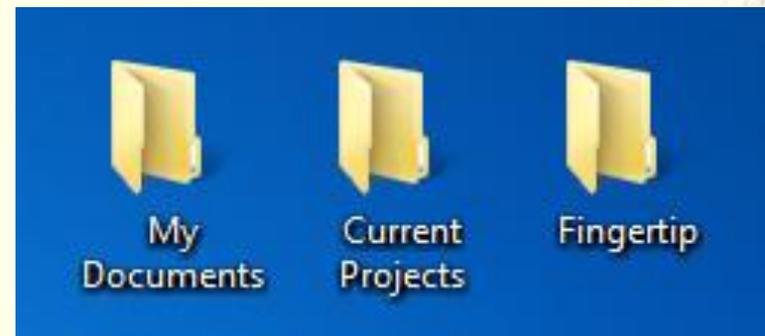
Now that I have Dropbox, "My Documents" still serves as the digital filing cabinet. *Every* document I save is going to be saved inside it. Windows 7 introduced the idea of a "library" for each of four types of files: documents, pictures, videos, and music. So, pictures, videos, or music which are not part of a current project go in their respective libraries.

Once each month, I create a new folder on my external hard drive, label it with the month and year, and drag those four libraries to that folder on the external hard drive. I now have a backup.

If your Dropbox happens to be inside your Documents folder, you also have those files on your external hard drive. If not, Dropbox is automatically backed up to the cloud.

On my other computers, I also backup those four libraries to that same hard drive.
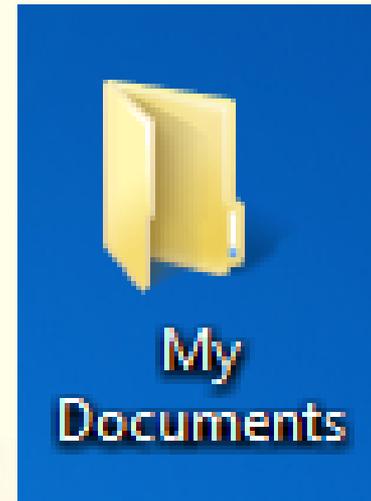
When I downloaded Dropbox to each of my computers, it automatically created a "My Dropbox" folder, You will probably also find that it creates a shortcut to Dropbox on your desktop. Anything I save inside "My Dropbox" is going to be saved "to the cloud" and to every one of my other devices.

When I made Dropbox a part of my organizational arsenal, I moved all of my current projects to the "My Dropbox" folder. Now, the Current Projects folder *is* "My Dropbox."

Inside the "My Dropbox" folder, I created a folder called "Fingertip." Here is where I will put all of the commonly-used reference documents. Because the Fingertip folder is inside "My Dropbox," I will have access to those documents from everywhere.

There is only one problem. To get to my "Fingertip" folder, I have to open My Dropbox to get to it. That does not sound like something being right at my *fingertips* does it?
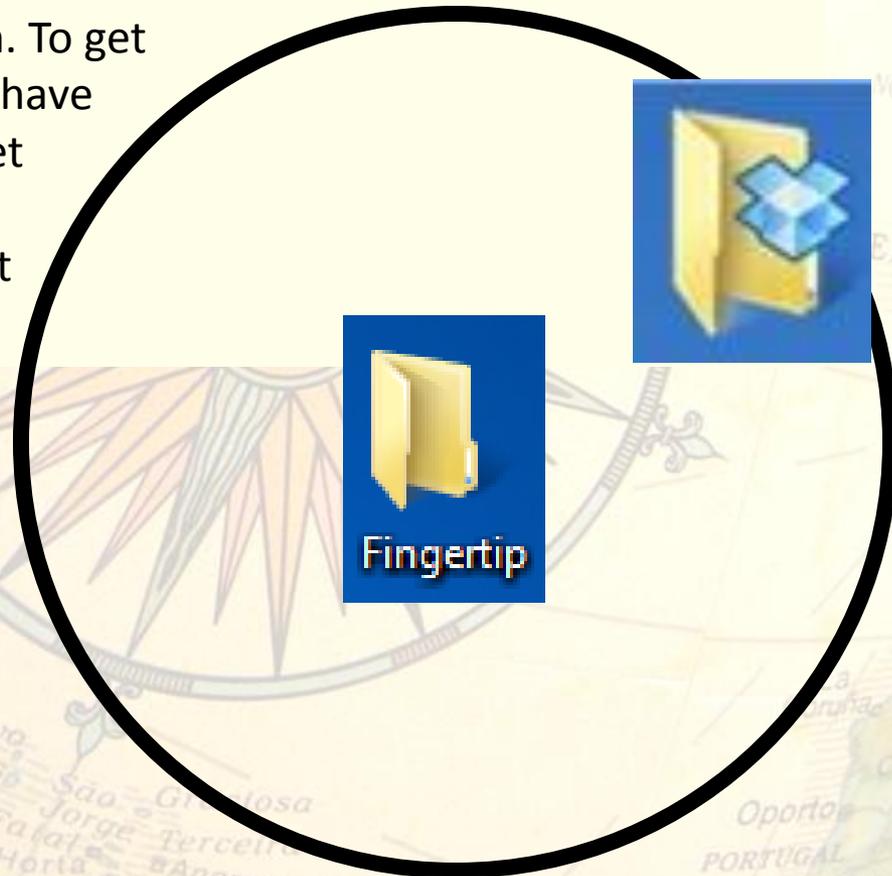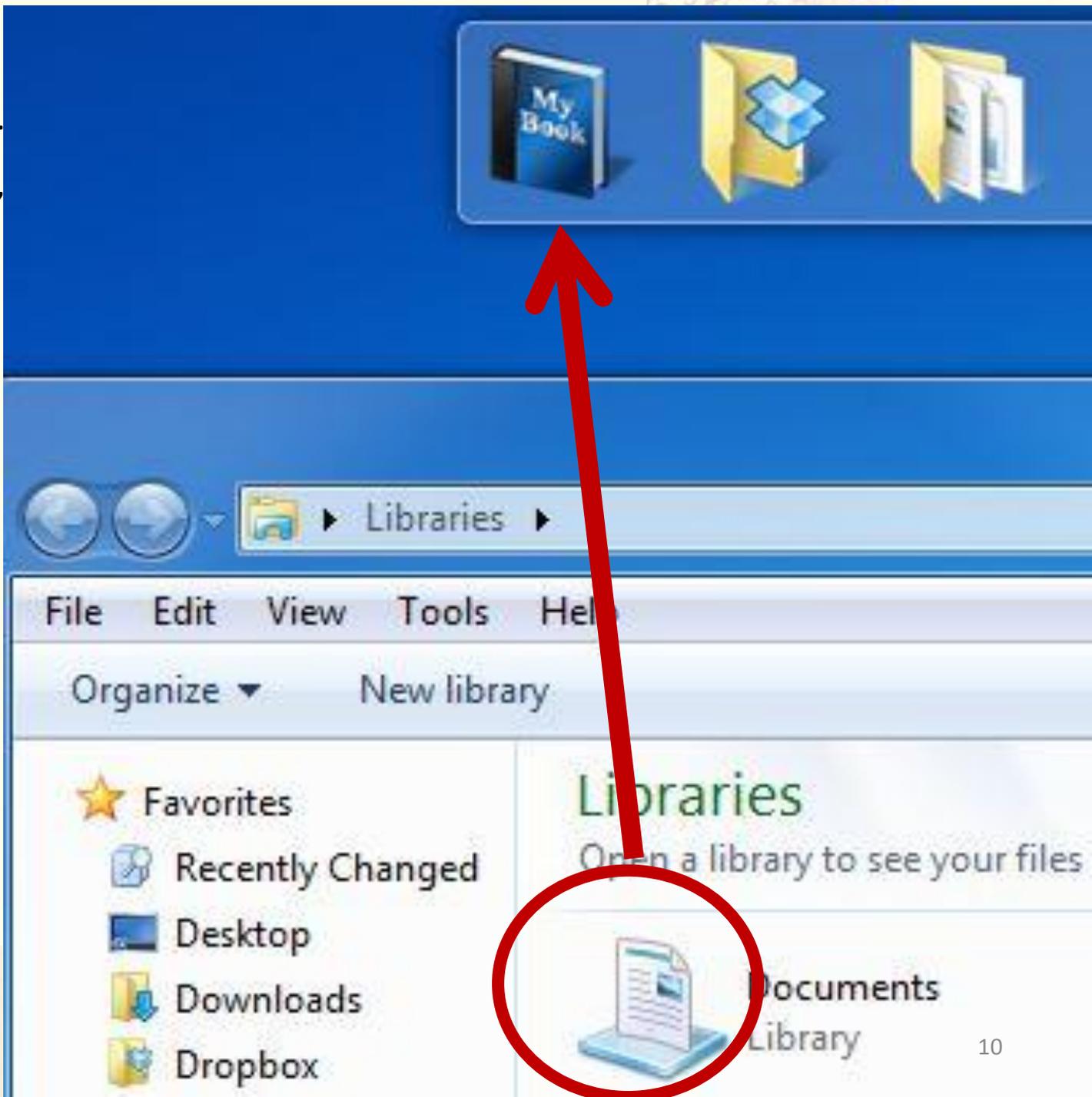
Wouldn't it better if my folders looked like they did before Dropbox: three folders sitting on the desktop? Well, that is exactly what I am going to have. I am going to accomplish this task by creating three shortcuts. Two may *already* have been created.
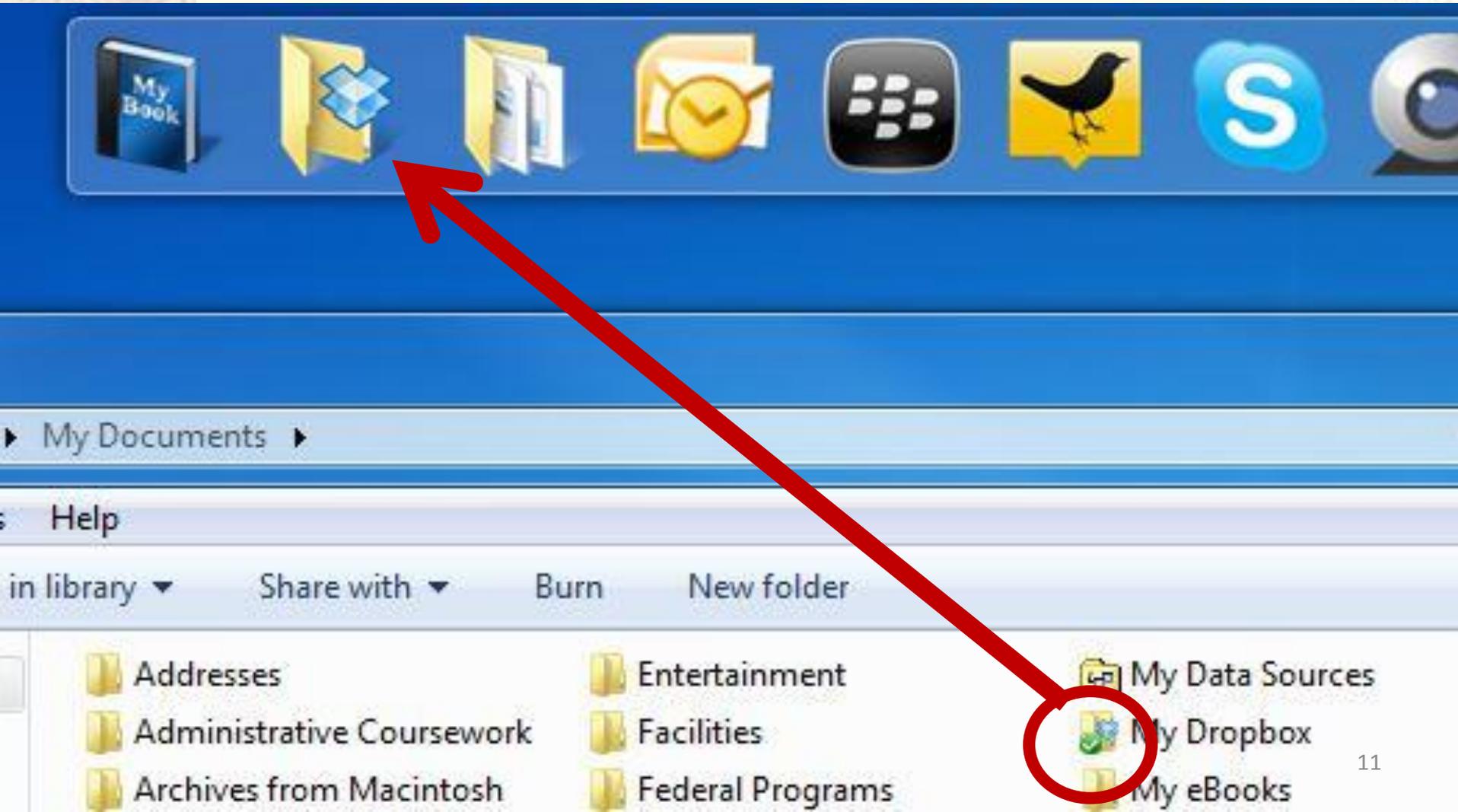
If you already have a shortcut to "My Documents," that's great. If not, create one. Right-click on the "Documents" library. Choose "Create Shortcut." Drag that shortcut to the "dock" on Windows 7 or to the desktop.

Why do I have that *blue book* icon and how did I get it? I wanted an icon that would stand out and look different from everything else on the dock. I can click on any of the icons on the dock, select "Edit," and choose from a variety of icons.

▸ Libraries ▸

File   Edit   View   Tools   Help

Organize ▼   New library

⭐ Favorites

Libraries
Open a library to see your files

📑 Recently Changed

🖥 Desktop

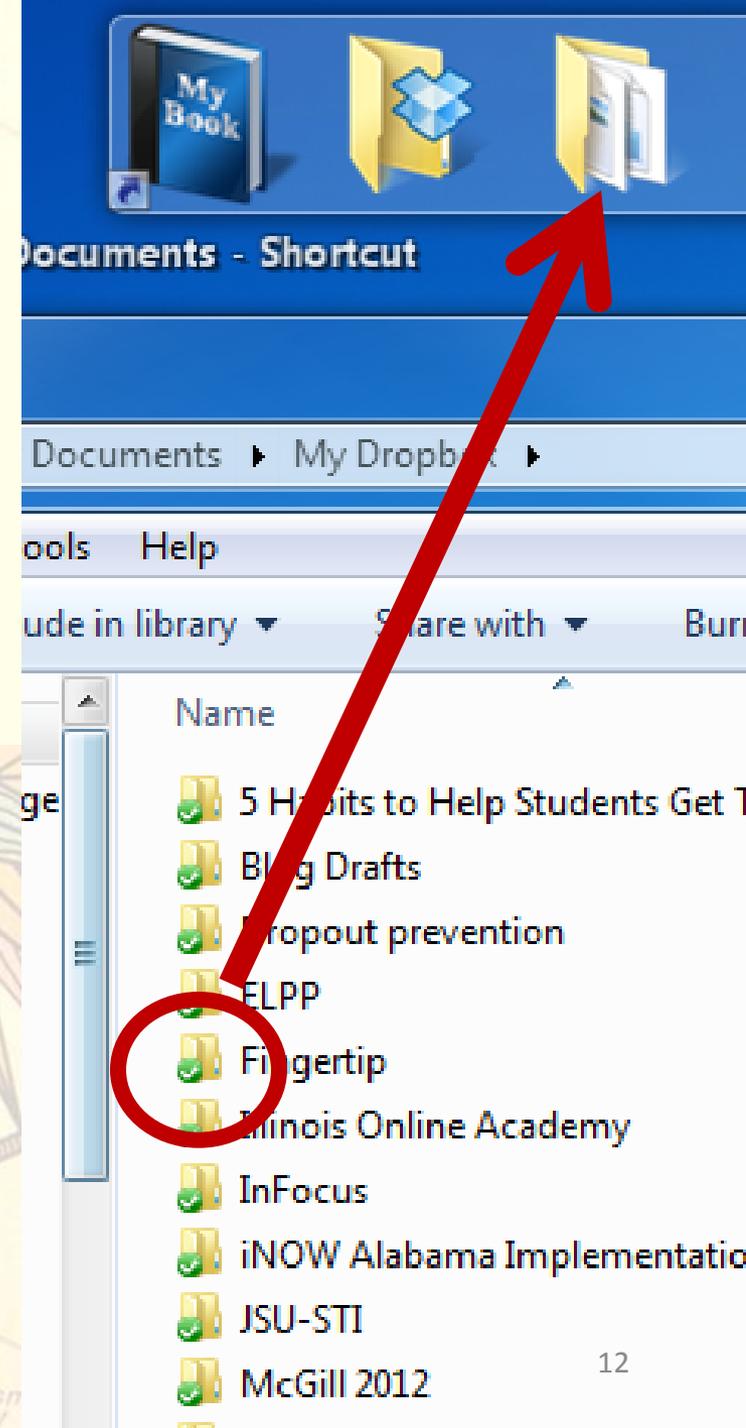⬇ Downloads

📦 Dropbox

Documents
Library

If you already have a shortcut to Dropbox, great. If not, create one. Open "My Documents," right-click the "My Dropbox" folder, choose "Create shortcut," and drag it to the dock (or desktop).

My Documents ▶

Help

in library ▼   Share with ▼   Burn   New folder

Addresses   Entertainment   My Data Sources
Administrative Coursework   Facilities   My Dropbox
Archives from Macintosh   Federal Programs   My eBooks

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For sure, we will need to make a shortcut for the Fingertip folder:
1. Open the "My Dropbox" folder.
2. Locate the "Fingertip" folder.
3. Right-click and create a shortcut.
4. Drag that shortcut to the dock (or desktop).

You will want to create these same three shortcuts on all of your computers.

Documents - Shortcut

Documents ▸ My Dropbox ▸

ools   Help

ude in library ▾   Share with ▾   Bur

Name

5 Habits to Help Students Get T
Blog Drafts
Dropout prevention
ELPP
Fingertip
Illinois Online Academy
InFocus
iNOW Alabama Implementatio
JSU-STI
McGill 2012

Here is the finished product: three folders on the "dock" or desktop. On the left is my "filing cabinet" of reference information. In the middle is Dropbox, housing all of my current projects. The contents of that Dropbox folder will be the same on *all* of my devices. When I make changes to anything in that folder, those changes are made in the cloud and in the Dropbox folder on each of my devices.

On the right is my "Fingertip" file. It's a shortcut. Remember, the *real* one is in "My Dropbox." So, anything saved in "Fingertip" on my computer is saved to the cloud and to the Fingertip folder on every other device.
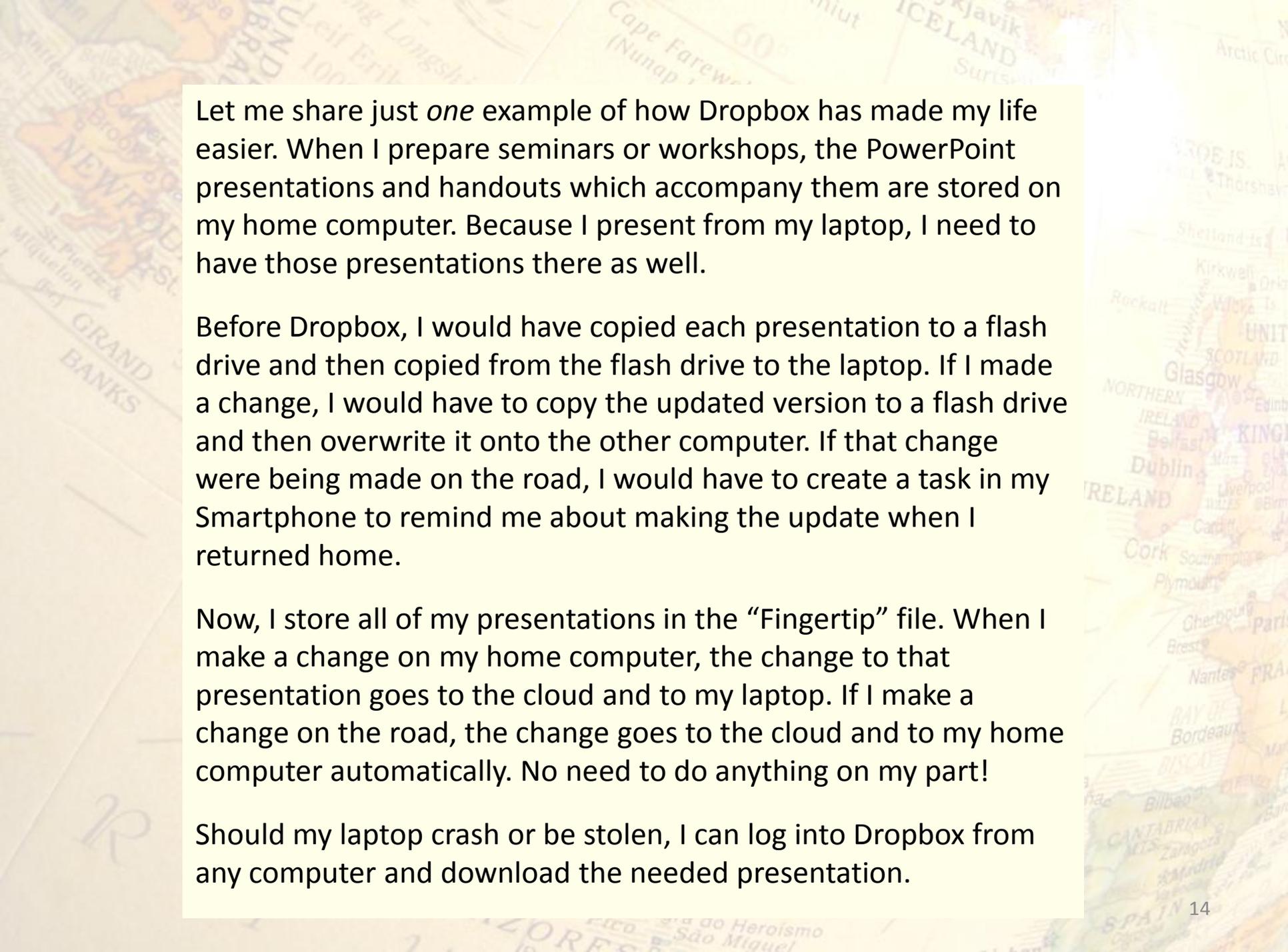
Let me share just *one* example of how Dropbox has made my life easier. When I prepare seminars or workshops, the PowerPoint presentations and handouts which accompany them are stored on my home computer. Because I present from my laptop, I need to have those presentations there as well.

Before Dropbox, I would have copied each presentation to a flash drive and then copied from the flash drive to the laptop. If I made a change, I would have to copy the updated version to a flash drive and then overwrite it onto the other computer. If that change were being made on the road, I would have to create a task in my Smartphone to remind me about making the update when I returned home.

Now, I store all of my presentations in the "Fingertip" file. When I make a change on my home computer, the change to that presentation goes to the cloud and to my laptop. If I make a change on the road, the change goes to the cloud and to my home computer automatically. No need to do anything on my part!

Should my laptop crash or be stolen, I can log into Dropbox from any computer and download the needed presentation.

I hope this short guide gives you a clear idea of how Dropbox can fit into your organizational arsenal, and how it can make your life easier.

If you have thoughts, please stop by my blog and share those with me. The address is http://FrankBuck.blogspot.com.

You can also find me at:

> http://FrankBuck.org
> http://Twitter.com/DrFrankBuck
> http://Facebook.com/DrFrankBuck
> http://YouTube/DrFrankBuck

Best wishes in your efforts to "*Get Organized*!"

—Frank Buck