

[Apps for Taking Inventory at Home](#)

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By FARHAD MANJOO, The New York Times
HONESTLY, I didn't set out to be a hoarder. It's just that I'm a tech reviewer, and sometimes that amounts to the same thing. Technology companies are always sending me gadgets to evaluate; it's my job to catalog everything that arrives, keep notes on how I use the products, maintain the packing materials and manuals, and then send it all back. (Ethics!) It's a logistical nightmare. At any moment there are several phones, computers, video game systems and other small electronics strewn around the floor of my home office, and many more in every other part of the house. As if that weren't enough stuff, my family has too many other things: I'm a sucker for cooking equipment, my wife's stash of yarn keeps the world's shepherds in business (she's a knitter), we both buy more books than we can read, and our baby is constantly showered with toys and clothes. Ascetic readers would advise us to pare down, to lead simple, joyful, stuff-free lives. But that's not really my style; I'm a materialist to the core. Instead, I set out to find a way to manage our possessions. Is there an easy way to organize everything? The answer: not really. There are lots of bad, a few so-so, and some great computer programs to help you create an inventory. Unfortunately, even the best ones require some work — too much work, I imagine, for all but the most organized people. In other words, not me. But if you are a neat freak — if you look forward to cleaning your closets on weekends, or rejoice at the prospect of alphabetizing your DVDs — then consider investing in a good home inventory manager. Creating and maintaining an inventory might take a few weekends, but it will help you better understand what you own — a first step toward getting rid of unnecessary things, like those three extra copies of "The Great Gatsby." And if you have only one copy of "Gatsby," such a product will tell you where it is (bedroom closet? bookshelf in the den?). It will also prove handy for insurance claims, and it will avoid the "spice rack" problem, where you end up with a half-dozen bottles of chili pepper in the kitchen because you were always unsure if you had any. Let's start with the software I liked least: home inventory apps for the iPhone and iPad. The first app, a \$4.99 iPhone program called Home Inventory, made by Gotta Have It Software, was buggy. I tried to type in descriptions of my items, but the app crashed several times. When I loaded it back up, it sometimes forgot some stuff I had already entered. An app that loses track of your home inventory isn't a very good way to keep track of your home inventory. Two

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other \$4.99 apps — My Stuff, by Rick Maddy, a programmer, for the iPhone, and the Itemizer by Digital2Analog Software, for the iPad — were more reliable. Still, I found each a pain to use. To enter a new item into My Stuff, you tap on a location or category (say, Living Room, or Electronics) and then type in the object’s details. The Itemizer process is similar. But this is easier said than done. Typing in the make, model, price and other data for all your goods would be a hassle on a regular keyboard. On a touch screen, it is maddening. Better, I thought, to stick with home inventory software for full-size PCs. Which brings us to Collectify Home Inventory, a \$50 program for Windows that you can download and try out for 30 days without obligation. Collectify does many things right. It has an intuitive interface and a straightforward way to input your items. After listing all the rooms in your house, you add details of each object by room. Collectify offers several ways of doing this. The quickest is to photograph everything in the room and upload the pictures into Collectify. Now comes the hard part. You click on a photo, then type in a barrage of details (if you can find or remember them): How much did you pay for that couch? What’s the model number of your TV? Setting up your inventory on Collectify is a weeks-long process, and consequently may be best just for a few large or expensive items. Don’t expect to catalog hundreds of DVDs this way. Two Mac programs I tried offer roughly the same features as Collectify, and both are much cheaper and better designed. The first, a \$10 program called Compartments by LittleFin Software, has a nice feature called WarrantyGuard that tracks your items’ warranty expiration dates so that, if something goes wrong, you can quickly learn if you are still covered. The second Mac program I liked was Home Inventory, by Binary Formations, which is \$15. (Confusingly, Home Inventory for the Mac is not related to Home Inventory for the iPhone.) I found this program as quick and as easy to use as Compartments, but Home Inventory has a plus: it offers a companion “remote” that lets you take pictures and add details of your stuff with your iPhone. But there’s that problem again: you must add all the item details manually. I kept wondering why I had to perform this chore. After all, many items in my house — my DVDs, my electronics, my kitchen gadgets — are sold online, which means that many of their details are sitting in a database somewhere. Wouldn’t it be great if a home inventory program could somehow look up all these facts online? That’s the magic of Delicious Library 2, a \$25 Mac program that I found to be the best of the home inventory managers I tested. What makes Delicious Library so delicious is automation. Instead of asking you to type in, say, a book’s title, author and other details, you simply point your computer’s camera at the book’s bar code. Delicious Library scans the bar code, looks up all the product details online and adds the object to your inventory. Wil Shipley, the founder of Delicious Monster, the company that makes the software, notes that most goods you buy these days include bar codes: tools, electronics, clothes, toys, kitchen gadgets. I found Delicious Library phenomenally good at recognizing items across a wide range of categories. It was able to correctly identify virtually any CD or

DVD I chose, almost every baby toy, many tools and even some of the groceries. Two caveats: Many products have the bar code on the package, not the product, so it will be difficult to scan your TV unless you still have the box. If you don't, you will have to enter the details manually, as with the other software I tried. But DVDs, books and CDs — the often-numerous items that are major offenders in cluttered households — usually come stamped with a code. I found the program's camera-based scanner to be good, doing its work quickly. For faster scanning, you can buy a bar code scanner for your computer. Delicious Monster sells an add-on wireless scanner for \$215, but less sophisticated ones are available at online retailers for as little as \$30. Another advantage of Delicious Library: It automatically categorized my goods, placing toys, tools, books and DVDs in separate areas of the program. It also let me assign locations to each item. I can quickly see what I've got in the den, and what I have in the tool shed. Best of all, when a friend borrows anything, you can make note of it. Indeed, this last feature is one of the reasons that Mr. Shipley set out to create an inventory manager. "I'd lost four 18-volt cordless drills in a row," he said. "They sell for \$140 each, so that just made me bitter. Now when someone borrows one of these things, I can come after them."