The Case for Using a Paper Planner

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Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

By Kristin Wong
Jan. 4, 2018

In college, my entire life fit neatly inside my paper planner. It housed my to-do lists, class assignments, due dates, phone numbers, scribbles — you name it. These days, my phone has taken over most of those tasks, and while apps are convenient and fun to use, there was something satisfying about checking in with this planner every day.

Aside from the nostalgia factor, writing by hand forces you to slow down and approach your planning with more mindfulness. Research even suggests that writing things down by hand helps you retain information better, which is a useful perk if you *really* don't want to forget that important work deadline.

"Some people are going to find paper very frustrating," said Jackie Reeve, a writer at Wirecutter, a New York Times company. "But when we interviewed experts for our planner guide, a lot of them noticed this tangible feel to paper that people prefer." In her in-depth review of paper planners for Wirecutter, Ms. Reeve discovered a commonly cited perk of using a paper planner: the ability to keep everything in one place, instead of bouncing from app to app.

"If you're using your phone, you're going into different apps for different purposes," Ms. Reeve said. "Your calendar won't do everything: You might be using a separate to-do list app, you might be using a separate app for notes. So one of the benefits is having this one book that can have everything in it. You can have it all in one place, and it can be almost as portable as a phone."

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After years of digitizing your entire life, going back to paper can be vexing, though. If you want to make the switch, here's how.

First, figure out how much you want to spend.

Paper planners run the gamut on pricing: They can be $100 or more. "These are beautiful leather planners, but you may get it and find that you're just not using it," Reeve warned. Many of the planners Ms. Reeve reviewed are in the $25 to $35 range, including the Traveler's Notebook, their top pick.

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Kristin Wong is a freelance writer and the author of "Get Money."

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