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## Keeping a Journal: The Hot New Thing in Productivity

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Post

by Carolyn F. Evans, Staples® Contributing Writer

Think keeping a journal is an activity reserved only for love-struck teenage girls? Or is too old fashioned for modern entrepreneurs?

Think again. Today's small business owners have to function in a constant state of information overload, and many are turning to journals as a tool for managing the overload and growing their businesses.

In fact, Fast Company named longtime journal manufacturer [Moleskine](#) one of the world's top productivity companies in 2014 alongside tech giants like Google.

Arthur Zilberman, CEO of [Laptop MD](#) in New York, NY, believes his journal enhances his productivity. "A journal gives me a way to document ideas that could potentially enhance my business."

Journals have regained popularity as small business owners look for ways to capture ideas as efficiently as possible — and as studies show writing, rather than typing, notes may be more effective.

### The Business Case for Journaling

"There's real value to being able to empty our overloaded minds," says Katie Mazzocco, entrepreneurial productivity coach and CEO of [Full Spectrum Productivity](#) in Imperial, PA. "In our culture of constant noise, it adds clarity to our ideas." She sees true profit value in journaling. "I have lots of clients who have a tendency to abandon a current project that is producing revenue to pursue an idea that isn't fully developed. Incomplete ideas don't make money. You're finishing a project in progress."

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It's a next big idea to sidetrack a current, functional program, Mazzocco recommends quickly "parking" that brilliant idea in a journal and getting back to the business at hand. When time allows, you can return to that idea and develop it further.



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## Choose the Right Tool

Paper journal or electronic app? **Blank pages** or **grid**? The first step is choosing the system that works for you. “There’s just something magic for me about the physical act of writing,” says Will Regan, co-founder of **Cardiff Products** in San Marcos, CA. “The simplicity seems to add clarity to my thoughts.” Others may be more inclined to keep a digital journal using apps like **Evernote** or Apple’s iDiary journal that offer easy indexing and search capabilities.

Zilberman combines paper and electronic to get the best of both worlds. “I’m 40 years old,” he explains. “I just like pen and paper.” But running four businesses in two states left the entrepreneur with little notes scattered everywhere. The solution? “I use a **Moleskine journal**, and I photograph the pages in Evernote. Then I use that to organize everything into action points and tasks, and share it with my employees.”

## Keep It Organized

Without a plan, a journal can easily become a big book of scribbles and ramblings, and instead of ideas being temporarily “parked,” the ideas are abandoned before they even start. That’s why Mazzocco recommends creating categories specific to your business or industry in your paper or digital journal, such as:

- Joint venture ideas
- Future programs
- Marketing ideas
- New customer resources
- Free writing (general narratives)

Ensure easy access to the information by creating tabs in a paper journal, keep a separate **notebook** for each category, or set up folders in an electronic app.

The best journals are active documents, so set a regular time to review and organize your notes and categories. Then choose a few to operationalize. “Attach ideas in your journal to a strategic business plan,” suggests Mazzocco. “Use that to fuel your future strategy.”

Zilberman uses time away from his business to review and reorganize his notes and develop his ideas into working projects. “You can really get a different perspective in a different setting.”

## Write Every Day

Whether it’s a set time or a spur-of-the-moment event, our experts agree that successful journaling must be a daily activity. “Do it for 10–15 minutes every day, and it becomes a habit,” recommends Zilberman.

Don’t fall into the trap of trying to make your journal writing letter-perfect. Focusing too much on spelling, usage and grammar can actually reduce journaling success, according to **Patti Wood**, a business consultant in Decatur, GA. “This is not refined, perfect creative writing. It’s musings, lists, to-do’s, dreams, worries and sometimes just junk.”

Business journaling isn’t just a hot trend. It’s a proven way to harness your ideas and drive your business goals.

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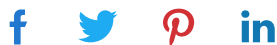
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