



January 22, 2009

Paper calendars surpass technology for many

By Bonna Johnson
THE TENNESSEAN

As a personal assistant, Robin Moore has to keep up with the busy lives of a dozen different clients.

But in a time when smartphones, PDAs and computer calendars are designed to keep track of our fast-paced lives, the Nashville woman would rather schedule all the tasks and phone calls she juggles in a day on paper.

Yes, paper calendars, which are about as low-tech as you can get.

They're not filled with bits and bytes, they don't buzz or blink and they certainly don't ask you to "dismiss" or "snooze" a pre-programmed reminder.

But for Moore, her day planner "is like a security blanket."

"I'm ready at a moment's notice to jot something down, and I love the whole act of marking something off a list," says Moore, whose job as a personal and corporate concierge can have her watering plants, picking up office supplies, going to the post office and calling an interior decorator in one afternoon.

"Technology is supposed to make things easier, but sometimes the old ways are still better," explains Moore, 47, who at that moment was driving a client's Subaru Outback to emissions testing.

Indeed, there's something about putting pen to paper that makes a calendar entry feel real, says Laura Carpenter, assistant professor of sociology at Vanderbilt University.

"Just because technology exists doesn't necessarily mean it will fit in our lives very well," says Carpenter, 39, noting that an online appointment calendar in her office was supposed to improve efficiency but is rarely used. "But, when it does fit well, then people tend to adopt it."

Market continues to grow

Whether you're the type that uses two planner pages per day or prefers a month at a glance, "The visceral act of writing something down is something people like," says Kent Frogley, senior vice president of global marketing at Salt Lake City-based FranklinCovey, an organization consultant that makes the well-known Franklin Planner.

"It helps them remember things and prompts the thought process in a different way than texting," he says.

Some people who gave up their paper planner system to use a smartphone or PDA ultimately returned to paper, Frogley says.

"They discover after a while that there is something about paper they like," he says.

And, "Contrary to what a lot of people believe, this is not a market segment that is shrinking because of technology," Frogley says. He noted that FranklinCovey planners can be found in some 14,000 storefronts, including FranklinCovey shops and office supply stores. In 2003, it was in just 3,000 storefronts in the United States.

"People tend to add technology to paper, so they make have a smartphone for scheduling, calendaring and contact information but more often will use a paper planner for tasks, notes, project planning and all the things that people do," Frogley says.

Moore, the personal assistant, has never tried to transfer her paper calendar to electronic form. There's just too much written down, says Moore, who fills two pages per day with tasks, errands and phone calls to return, as well as her own personal appointments.

"You can't type as quickly, and then you have to push another button if you want to type a number or get a symbol, like a dollar sign," Moore says about the tiny buttons on her Palm Treo, which she uses to hold her contact lists. "It's just faster to write it down, especially if you just have a second or two."

She's got nothing against technology and would even be inclined to use a computer calendar if she sat at a desk all day. As is, though, "My office is my car, and my trunk is like a big purse."

'I'm just old-school'

Could the preference for paper or PDA be a generational thing? Maybe so.

Professor Carpenter at Vanderbilt noted that graduate students often will use a paper day planner, even though they have a Blackberry, too. The younger undergrads tend to use their phone calendars more, although their lives may not be as complicated.

Real estate agent Christine Nale, 53, needs to be able to see all her appointments in a given week at the same time, which is impossible on her Palm smartphone, which just displays a daily calendar or a whole month, with unhelpful dots representing appointments.

"I'm a very visual person," says Nale, who lives in Gallatin. "When I open my calendar, I have a view of my whole week."

If she's caught without her leather-bound calendar, she'll enter information on her smartphone and then transfer it to paper later. "I can make more elaborate notes in my paper calendar," she says.

Her mom teases her about her "black book," and Nale panics if she thinks she's misplaced it. "Maybe I'm just old-school," Nale says.

Eve White, 76, of Donelson, makes no apologies about her old-fashioned love for paper over gadgets.

"I don't like all that texting stuff," says White, who keeps track of her medical secretarial service business and personal appointments on a kitchen calendar. Buttons on handheld gadgets are too small, she complains.

And the tiny screens require her to "squint my eyes to enter and read my notes," White says. "I do enjoy my old and simple and quiet ways of planning my life."
