BEST BUDGETING AND MONEY SAVING APPS

There are practical steps you can take to improve your company's financial health.

UNLESS YOU'RE AN EXPERIENCED FINANCIAL PROFESSIONAL, MANAGING YOUR PERSONAL FINANCES CAN BE CONFUSING AND EVEN OVERWHELMING.

(This underscores the value of engaging with a financial professional to help manage your finances.) However, if you want to take the independent route for some basic money management, there are practical steps you can take to get things a little "neater" on your own.

No, we don't mean enroll in an accounting or wealth management course at a local community college (though that's always an option). Rather, if you're looking to develop and manage a budget, obtain money saving tips, or just figure out how much to tip on your restaurant bill, there's an app for that. Probably.

Even the most hurried search on the Google Play or Apple Store reveals thousands of finance-related applications, each with various bells and whistles that collectively provide you with insights into your finances. Below are a few of the more popular ones for you to consider:

- Qapital is a behind-the-scenes money saver, which transfers spare change from your debit and credit card purchases into your savings account. The app gamifies the saving process, moving money pursuant to certain earning or spending goals that the user sets. For instance, one rule might be that for every latte purchase at a coffeeshop, the app will deposit $1 into savings. The app integrates with other apps and social media platforms.

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- **Mint** is a popular, feature-rich, free app that tracks income, expenses, savings, and investments, among other categories. It syncs easily with bank and credit card accounts, allowing users to set savings goals, track investments, monitor their credit, and receive bill payment reminders. As a tradeoff to its complimentary offering, the app allows ads.
- **You Need a Budget** is designed for more serious budgeters, adopting a "zero-based budgeting system" that makes sure every earned dollar is allocated to something (i.e., savings, food, etc.). The app allows users to set financial goals and promotes itself as helping diligent users get out of debt. The app will set you back at least $12 per month and comes with personal customer support.
- **For those who have trouble sticking to a budget, PocketGuard** may be able to help. After a user provides details for estimated income, upcoming expenses, and savings goals, the app calculates how much is left for discretionary spending, helping to prevent you from overspending. The app syncs with bank and credit card accounts. A free version provides access to basic budgeting, while a paid subscription ($34 per year) provides more robust features.
- **Investors may find value in Personal Capital**, a free app that includes a money-tracking dashboard, net-worth tracker, and details about your investment portfolio. While the budgeting features might not be as powerful as those found in other apps, access is free, and users can access a financial planning blog, too.

Keep in mind that budgeting apps are not sophisticated accounting software. The latter generally comes at a cost (few good ones are free), with more sophisticated features that take longer to master.

Additionally, consider the apps as helpful guides but not experts. Most are designed for light-duty budgeting, with basic features that may not provide you with all of the necessary insights to control your finances. For that, you may find it helpful to consult a financial professional.

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