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Summer Is Here!

Check out how you can connect with us this month!

- Is your child part of our C.A.F.E youth program? Our 2nd Annual Achievement Awards Celebration is Thursday, June 29th! [Click here](#) for more details.
- Are you AutoSMART? Check out our newest online tool that makes buying a new car a breeze! You can shop, research, and finance your new vehicle – all in one place!
- Is your dad a rock star? What is the best advice he ever gave you? Tell us on Facebook and he could win a \$75 gift card to Home Depot! For more information and to enter, check out our Facebook page .

Get Your Finances in Order

How to get financially organized

Do you often find you're scatterbrained when it comes to keeping your finances in order? More important, do you spend more than you can afford? More than one-third of adults do, and an estimated 76 percent of Americans are living from paycheck to paycheck, according to BankRate.com. And that means it's time to start really getting down to business about keeping more organized to avoid spending more than you should be spending.

"You cannot be in denial about finances," Dr. Phil says. "It doesn't matter what you think you deserve, what you think you need, even — and [it] certainly doesn't matter what you want or desire. When you're dealing with finances, you've got to deal with reality."

Here are some top tips for getting financially organized:

Ditch paper - Most bills can be paid online, so you might want to take advantage of that, as too much paper increases the chance that things will get lost. If you use a scanner, you're more likely to be able to keep things in order (plus, it's better for the environment).

"Simply scan photos and paper documents to create electronic copies. By transferring all physical records into electronic format, you'll be able to later print the records," says Lynnette Khalfani Cox, author of "Zero Debt: The Ultimate Guide to Financial Freedom."



You should also store at least one backup copy on a CD or memory stick. Not ready to go paperless completely? Invest in a paper shredder.

"It eliminates waste, and that's pretty crucial," says CPA and financial planner David Bendix, president of The Bendix Financial Group in Garden City, New York. "It's smart, and it'll help you get organized."

Start a retirement plan - While you're getting your finances in order, it's a good time to set up a 401(k) or other retirement plan (if you haven't already) to help you save for the future.

"Having a long-term allocation to equities is necessary for combating inflation in the future and making sure that you have enough money to buy the things you want when you are retired," said iShares Asset Allocation Strategist Jane Leung. Try to invest as much as you can in a 401(k), and take advantage of whatever company matches available to you. If you don't have access to a 401(k), you can open an IRA.

Be detailed about files - "Think about those files you access the most and the reasons why," says Wayne Bogosian, president and managing director of the PFE Group, and co-author of "The Complete Idiot's Guide to 401(k) Plans." "Rather than dumping everything into a general folder called 'documents' or 'photographs,' break it down into primary and secondary folders." That means being as specific as possible (e.g., "tax returns," "credit/debit cards," "insurance," etc.).

"And don't be an 'e-pack rat,'" says Bogosian. "Chances are, that document you saved in 1997 isn't going to do you much good today."

Open an emergency fund - No one wants to find themselves strapped for cash, especially in an emergency. That's why it's wise to start building a just-in-case fund to help keep things in order.

"\$1,000 would be the first goal to work toward," says Tom Maynard, finance instructor at Converse

College. "Then try to get to the point where it's equal to one month's take-home pay, and then two months' take-home pay, and if you can get to where you have three months' take-home pay, then you probably have reached a level that, I'm going to guess on this, but I'll bet you 10 percent of the American public does not have."

Keep a checklist handy - Start each month by making a checklist of each bill you know will be arriving. Keep the list in the same place at all times, and be sure to update it regularly. You can refer to it whenever you need to verify whether you've paid — or you haven't paid — a bill. Whether via mail or email, not all important documents always make their way to you in a timely manner, so keeping a list helps you stay on track and notice if something wasn't delivered on time (which can be a common occurrence).

We can help you get your finances in order - contact us today.

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Which Loans Should You Pay Down First?

Philosophies for paying off your debt

Is there a right or wrong way to pay down your loans? The answer is not cut and dried; it depends on your financial and personal goals and objectives.

Here are two main theories about the order in which you should pay off loans, along with further advice about each of those plans.

Theory No. 1: Highest interest rate first

The first school of thought is to pay off debts by interest rate from highest to lowest. The theory behind this is that it will save you the most money in the long run. This plan makes sense because debt with high interest is costing you much more money over time. The problem with this strategy is this: You may have more control over your finances, but you won't feel as though you do.



Be aware — if your highest-interest loan is also your largest debt, it will take a while to pay it off. It may not look or feel as though you are making any progress for quite some time. This lack of satisfaction — not feeling that the debt is well on track to be paid in full — could make it more difficult to stay focused on your goal of paying off debt. That leads to the second intellectual outlook.

Theory No. 2: Smaller debts first

If you are in to immediate gratification, this is the plan for you.

“You can clear up a lot of smaller monthly payments and quickly apply those to the extra money you are paying off on your debt snowball,” explains money management expert Miriam Caldwell, author of the online blog “Money in Your 20s.”

The downside here is that you could miss out on some important tax benefits of having big loans paid down, and you could end up paying a lot more interest in the end (see reasoning behind Theory No.1) by putting high-interest loans last in order of importance.

So what's an embattled debt-payer to do?

Balance your approach

You may choose to intertwine the two methods. Start by knocking out a few of your small loans in the first couple of months, and then work on larger-interest debt before going back to paying on small loans again. Another way to balance out your methodology is to pay smaller loans off more quickly if their interest rates are generally within a percentage point or two, because that will give you more power (i.e., money) to pay off the larger loans.

“You may want to put the loans that save you on your taxes at the end of your debt payment plan. This would be your student loan, home equity loan or second mortgage,” suggests Caldwell. “These debts may also have lower interest rates. This lets you continue to deduct the interest from your taxes each year.”

She adds that you should never hold on to debt simply for tax purposes.

Stick to the plan

Eventually, the minimum payments may start to go down on debts such as credit cards. As tempting

as it may be to use that extra money — those funds that you once had to put toward loan payments — on frivolous personal items, you must resist the urge. Use that extra money as an additional payment on your loans, using the same plan you started with initially to designate priority. This will help cut down your debt even more.

It may be hard to stay motivated, but you can do it! Create a chart so you can visually track your progress, or reward yourself at certain milestones with a small dinner out or a movie date. No matter what, remember that as long as you keep moving forward with a solid plan, progress is being made.

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Financial Tools for Small-Business Owners

Utilize these tools to increase efficiency and your bottom line

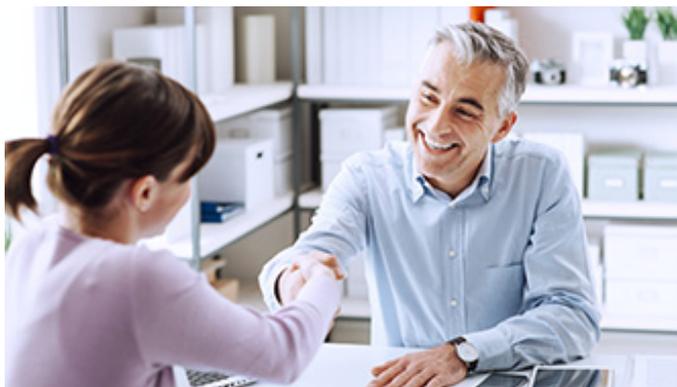
While cutting costs and streamlining performance are essential for any small business, most startup owners don't consider financial tools as the way to facilitate that.

In actuality, it is worth it to invest in some financial tools to help transform your operations, improve productivity, reduce costs and increase profit margins. Here are 10 general resources you should be using to help you plan for success:

1. Business plan software: Crucial to any business is a solid business plan. Ensure you've thought of everything by using online software resources such as the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) Business Plan Tool (<https://www.sba.gov/tools/business-plan/1>). It will walk you through every step you need to reach your goals, from gathering your thoughts to presenting to an investor and beyond.

2. Inventory management system: No matter your industry, it is crucial to keep track of your products for financial security, insurance reasons and much more. Award-winning online publication Small Business Trends recommends OfficeBooks (<http://officebooks.com/>) to track distribution and manufacturing.

"OfficeBooks is the tool you need when you're managing the many parts of distribution and manufacturing," says Tech Editor Matt Mansfield of Small Business Trends. "From inventory control to sales/quotes, purchase orders, contact management and reports, you'll find a lot to like in this solution."



3. Financial analysis tool: Once your business plan is solid and you know what you have in stock, you can begin analyzing where your company stands financially. The SBA recommends Score's vast array of financial statement templates (<https://www.score.org/resources/business-planning-financial-statements-template-gallery>), so you can keep up to date on your cash flow, profits and losses, and more — all in one place.

4. Accounting software: Find a computerized accounting system that will streamline your data. Intuit QuickBooks is always a popular choice, as it can simplify, automate and track financial information, including tax data. Another option, acclaimed by Catherine Clifford of Entrepreneur.com, is inDinero.

"inDinero pulls your transaction history from banks, credit cards and financial accounts and organizes it for you. There is no tedious data entry; you just input your account numbers," she writes, continuing, "It sorts transactions by category — such as payroll, advertising and dining — and tracks spending changes each month. It also creates accounting reports for you."

5. Invoicing software: Before you organize money with the accounting tools described above, you must obtain payments from clients. Get on that with products like Bitrix, a service Mansfield likes, which will save you time and leave little room for mistakes. Best of all, the basic level is free of charge.

6. Credit card processing method: Obtaining payments and tracking them is easy when you can accommodate credit cards. The most widely accepted type of payment these days, a credit card can work at a point-of-sale, a mobile card reader, a terminal or online. According to Clifford, a company called Authorize.Net has fairly universal software available.

7. Business credit card: The SBA advises obtaining a business credit card for your small business instead of using your personal card. Not only is it easier to track expenditures, but you also get access to a host of business-specific benefits such as employee cards, spending controls and more.

8. Business debit card: For reasons similar to those listed above, you'll want a business debit card as well. It gives you quick and convenient access to your business's checking account at millions of locations around the globe.

9. Credit monitoring: "It's crucial for small-business owners to keep a close eye on changes to their reports that could affect their company's ability to obtain credit," reads the SBA website. "Consider enrolling in an affordable monitoring service so you can review your company's credit file to ensure it's accurate and up-to-date."

10. Business credit checks: Performing credit checks will protect your company's cash flow by identifying the creditworthiness of customers. It's never a bad idea to make smart, well-informed credit decisions.

By taking advantage of these financial tools, you will be freeing up important time to manage your company and help it grow, while simultaneously improving your bottom line.

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What to Know About Home Equity Loans

If you're a homeowner, you have a powerful tool in your financial arsenal: the home equity loan

Home equity loans allow some consumers to borrow a large amount of money relatively easily and cheaply. But they aren't right for all situations. Here's a bit more about how they work and when they're a good option.

How home equity loans work

A home equity loan is a loan secured by the value of the borrower's house. Sometimes called second mortgages, home equity loans come with favorable terms because they're low risk for lenders. To qualify for one, you'll need significant equity in your home — that's the difference between what your home is worth and what you owe on it.

Lenders use a figure called loan-to-value ratio, or LTV, to help determine which loan applicants qualify. For example, if your house is worth \$250,000 and your mortgage balance is \$150,000, you have \$100,000 in equity. Your LTV, which is the amount you currently owe on the house divided by its current value, is 60%. The lower the LTV on your first mortgage, the easier it is to qualify for a second.

Keep in mind that a home equity loan is different from a home equity line of credit, also called a HELOC. Home equity loans are installment loans with fixed payments, like auto loans; HELOCs are revolving debt with variable payments, like credit cards.

Pros and cons

Home equity loans have a number of advantages over personal loans and some other kinds of debt:

- They typically have lower interest rates.
- They're easier to qualify for, even if you have average credit.
- Interest payments are tax-deductible in most cases.
- They offer potentially high loan amounts, depending on the home equity available.

There are also some downsides to home equity loans:

- If you miss payments on your loan, the lender can foreclose on your home.
- If your home value drops, you could end up with high LTV or even “underwater” on your mortgage, owing more than the home is worth. And if you were to sell your home, you would owe your lender the difference between the sale price and your mortgage at closing.

How to use a home equity loan

Because home equity loans can provide a large amount of money, borrowers tend to use them to pay major expenses, such as:

- College tuition.
- Large medical bills.
- Home improvements or major repairs.

Some homeowners use home equity loans to consolidate higher-interest debt, such as credit card debt. However, that's considered a risky move by consumer groups like the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, since failing to make payments on a second mortgage can lead to foreclosure.

Many factors should inform your decision about taking out a home equity loan, including the state of the real-estate market in your area and whether you have better ways to raise money. Talk with a representative at your local bank or credit union for more information.

Most importantly, make sure a home equity loan suits your long-term goals, as well as your more immediate needs.

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Are You Earning Points Through uChoose Rewards?

Check out these great benefits!

Click here for more information on uChoose Rewards

Did you know that uChoose Rewards offers gift cards that donate money to a local or national charity? Through CharityChoice, you can designate funds to thousands of local and national charities!

Shop at hundreds of your favorite retailers! Here are just a few of the merchants where you can earn points:

- Home Depot: Earn 5 points per \$1
- Kohl's: Earn 2 points per \$1
- Papa John's: Earn 5 point per \$1

Points can be redeemed for:

- Activities
- Event tickets
- Merchandise
- Travel
- Gift cards

Books for Your Kids to Read During Summer Break

Keep your kids learning with these books during summer break

Summer is a long-anticipated break for most students. Sleeping in, staying up late, outdoor fun, vacations and adventures make summer the best time of year; for some, the absolute best part about summer is no school. Books, tests and homework are shelved for a few months, and kids' only focus is to have fun.

Yet, all that focus on fun means that a lot of the reading and math skills students worked so hard to improve during the school year will start to decline, a phenomenon referred to as the summer slide. It is possible, though, for kids to have an incredibly fun summer and not lose what they've learned in school. By checking out some of the "Notable Children's Books" below recommended by the American Library Association's Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), kids will be able to keep their reading skills sharp during summer break.

Young readers

Preschool through second grade readers—(up to age 7)—will delight in discovering frogs of all sizes in the picture book "Fabulous Frogs" by Martin Jenkins. "Go, Otto, Go" by David Milgrim will transport readers out of this world as they follow the journey of Otto the robot. Kids will relate to the difficulty of getting to sleep in the comedic story of "Good Night Owl" by Greg Pizzoli. Even class pets want some time off from school, and "The Great Pet Escape" by Victoria Jamieson will thrill readers with its tale of adventure.



Middle readers

Readers in grades 3 – 5 or ages 8 – 10 will be captivated by all that Frank and Lucky discover in "Frank and Lucky Get Schooled" by Newbery Medalist Lynne Rae Perkins. The supernatural tale, "The Girl Who Drank the Moon" by Kelly Barnhill, is sure to captivate imaginations. Technology and the natural world collide in the enchanting story of "The Wild Robot" by Peter Brown. Readers can tag along on a magical adventure in "The Secret Keepers" by Trenton Lee Stewart.

Older readers

Readers in grades 6 – 8 or ages 11 – 14 will be inspired by the incredible accomplishments of the first African American military pilots depicted in "You Can Fly: The Tuskegee Airmen" by Carole Boston Weatherford. In the mysterious "The Lie Tree" readers will be transported to Victorian Britain. Readers will connect with the emotional struggle of Nick, a 12-year-old coming to grips with his parent's divorce in "Booked" by Kwame Alexander. The 2017 Newbery Honor Book "Wolf Hollow" by Lauren Wolk is a coming-of-age story of a young girl's courage in the face of bullying.

Finding a great read is a gift, any time of the year. During summer, though, it is an even greater gift because books will not only entertain young readers and fuel their imaginations, but also help strengthen their reading skills so they are ready for success in the fall.



Summer Movies to Look Forward To

Spend the summer at the theater with these upcoming films

If the heat is too much to handle this summer, then head to the nice, air-conditioned movies. Filmmakers are always trying to produce amazing summer blockbusters, and this year is no different. Below you'll find just a few of the best summer movies to look forward to.

Transformers: The Last Knight (PG-13)

Mark Wahlberg returns for the fifth installment of the "Transformers" franchise in "Transformers: The Last Knight," which is premiering on Friday, June 23rd. Following the absence of Optimus Prime, the human race has found itself in a war against the Transformers. Protagonist Cade Yeager (Wahlberg) forms an alliance with familiar Autobot Bumblebee, an Oxford professor (Laura Haddock) and an English lord (Anthony Hopkins) in order to learn why the Transformers keep returning to Earth and how they can potentially stop the continuous fighting.



The House (R)

"Saturday Night Live" alums Will Ferrell and Amy Poehler team up in this comedy about a set of parents who suddenly realize they don't have enough money to send their daughter to the college of her dreams. In a desperate attempt to raise the money in a short time period, they team up with their neighbor (Jason Mantzoukas) to create an illegal casino in his basement. Expect crude humor and appearances from other talented individuals like Nick Kroll, Rob Huebel and even Jeremy Renner. This funny and not-so-kid-friendly film is set to be released on June 30th.

Despicable Me 3 (PG)

Initial trailers for "Despicable Me 3" solely featured former villain turned family man Gru up against an '80s themed villain named Balthazar Bratt. While Bratt is still the antagonist in the film, newer trailers have introduced Gru's successful twin brother Dru. In the sneak peek, Gru and Dru pair up (with the help of the Minions) for one last criminal heist in order to acquire a diamond that Bratt had stolen. Hilarious hijinks are sure to occur in this fun summer movie, which premieres on June 30th.

Spider-Man: Homecoming (PG-13)

While there has already been two other versions of Spiderman films (starring Toby Maguire and Andrew Garfield), "Spider-Man: Homecoming" creators have promised that the new film will go more in-depth in regards to Peter Parker (Tom Holland) dealing with his super powers in high school. Also new to this film is a villain named Vulture (Michael Keaton). Other notable appearances include Zendaya as one of Peter's classmates and Robert Downey Jr. reprising his role as Iron Man. Head out to the theater on July 7th to see this new take on Spider-Man.

Dunkirk (PG-13)

There are currently two types of people that are interested in this film—war film enthusiasts and teenage girls. That may sound odd, but the inclusion of Harry Styles (of pop group One Direction) in the film has got "Dunkirk" on the radar of a new audience. The film was written by Oscar-nominated director Christopher Nolan and focuses on a group of Allied soldiers that are surrounded by the German Army during World War II. Additional talent in the film includes performances from Tom Hardy, Kenneth Branagh, Cillian Murphy and Mark Rylance. "Dunkirk" is set to premiere on Friday,

July 21st, and will be available in IMAX.

Whether you're looking for silly cartoons, adult humor or an action-packed story, you're bound to enjoy any of these upcoming films this summer.

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