

Online DIY options to bolster your personal finances

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USA TODAY – Once the optimistic glow surrounding New Year’s financial resolutions wears off — hello, February! — it’s time to roll up your sleeves before losing momentum altogether.

Whether you aim to save money or get stuff organized, many apps and websites are available to help. Here are some things you can do, along with a few caveats.

Show proof of car insurance and file claims)

Many insurers offer apps that let you pay bills, access policy information and file claims. Your insurer may have an app to help you prove you have car insurance during a traffic stop, avoiding a frantic search through the glove compartment. Unless you’re a driver in Connecticut, New Mexico or D.C. or your state doesn’t require insurance or ID cards), you can show insurance ID on your phone, according to the Property Casualty Insurers Association of America.

The caveat: Keep the paper card in the glove compartment as a backup in case someone else drives the car or you leave your phone behind.

Complete a home inventory

If a fire destroys your house, imagine listing from memory every item you lost in order to make an insurance claim. That would be tough on a good day. After a disaster, it’s a nightmare, says Amy Bach, executive director of United Policyholders, a consumer advocacy group.

“I think the brain tries to protect you from the sadness of things you lost,” making it harder to remember, she says. Apps such as United Policyholders’ UPHelp Home Inventory and the Insurance Information Institute’s Know Your Stuff guide you through documenting all your belongings. Proper documentation is a key to getting reimbursed fully by the insurance company. Your homeowners insurance company might offer an inventory app, too.

The caveat: Remember to update the inventory when you get new stuff.

Archive important documents

Companies such as Estate Map, Everplans and My Life & Wishes let you digitally store documents, life

insurance policy information and instructions for loved ones to access after your death. It's vital to keep information securely stored and let those who need access know how to find it.

The caveat: Some similar companies have already come and gone. Keep a backup paper file, and let your loved ones know how to find it.

Create legal documents

Online legal sites such as LegalZoom, Nolo and Rocket Lawyer provide do-it-yourself tools to create end-of-life planning documents, including wills, powers of attorney and health directives. Pricing is cheap, starting at under \$100 for a simple will.

The caveat: "Walk very, very carefully with online legal solutions," says Lawrence Lehmann, an immediate past president of the National Association of Estate Planners & Councils. He advises talking to an estate attorney or, if you can't afford one, seeking help through a low-cost legal aid clinic. These are powerful documents, and there are plenty of opportunities for missteps, which could wreak havoc later. "The devil is in the details," he says.

For example, Louisiana law says you must sign every page of your notarial typewritten vs. handwritten) will in front of a notary and two witnesses, among other rules. If you don't, the will is unenforceable.

Track spending, save money

A variety of free and low-cost apps helps you budget and save:

Intuit's Mint lets you link bank accounts, credit cards and bills and then shows where money is going and how to save.

Goodbudget lets you set aside money upfront in digital "envelopes," or categories, and tracks spending. Acorns rounds up to the next dollar your credit and debit card purchases and invests the change in a diversified portfolio.

Mint and Goodbudget offer free versions; Acorns charges \$1 a month or 0.25% per year for accounts of \$5,000 or more, but is free for college students.

The caveat: Understand how the fees work or, if the app is free, how the company makes money. Some of these apps might be right for you, but evaluate them objectively.

Apps can help you meet personal finance goals, but they can't do everything. Make sure you address big priorities, such as setting money aside in tax-advantaged retirement accounts and getting the right insurance coverage.