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Handwritten cards are an undervalued and underutilized business tool. When was the last time you received one via snail mail? Now when was the last time your email pinged? If your inbox is like mine, it is full of emails that need reading, responding and filing. Even with filters and spam guards, it only takes a couple hours for my inbox to get cluttered and my productivity to take a pummeling. Because of this, I have come to rather enjoy receiving snail mail and the brief reprieve it brings. And, when I receive a note from a colleague or new acquaintance, the rarity makes the task that much more enjoyable. I understand that the task of writing cards is cumbersome (not to mention outdated) and has been largely replaced by emails, Facebook messages and tweets. Sending a hand written note, however, to thank someone for a meeting or offer congratulations for a promotion, communicates volumes of in just a few words. Yes, it is time consuming, but because this small gesture can make such a large impression, here are some tips for streamlining the process and maximizing their impact. You can find simple, blank cards in the clearance aisle at OfficeMax or at Dollar General. Buy a box and keep a few with you at all times. Remember, it's the thought that counts. If you want to perk up your presentation, you can beautify your stationary through online services such as MoO.com, which will create customized, high-quality notecards for a premium. Take a few minutes to prep your envelopes with a return address label and stamp. This will not only cut out this step in the process, but it will make you more inclined to actually use them. And, yes, buy stamps. Real stamps. You've gone this far in the process, so don't ruin the impression with a generic red stamp from a postage meter. A long, detailed note defeats part of the original purpose. Simply include a brief reminder of where you met, what you discussed, and how thankful you are for their time. Anything more will most likely be seen as insincere and as an overzealous marketing ploy (it is, but it should not come across as such). Instead of using valuable notecard real estate reminding the recipient of who you are, include a business card and let it do the talking. Just make sure your business card says what you want it to say. I find that having a high quality pen helps. While I will make small corrections on the card, if the pen leaks, bleeds, or runs out of ink mid-message, it kills the presentation. If you find carrying cards with you too much, or you simply don't know where the nearest post office is located (hey, nobody's judging), then consider an app that will do the same thing. For instance, Felt is an app that allows users to create customizable greeting cards with handwritten messages on an iPad, which are then printed and mailed for you. It even allows you to handwrite the address on the envelope. Cost is steep at \$3.99 per card, but the presentation is very nice. Sending handwritten cards does not have to be a time consuming and burdensome task. The return on investment for your time, however, is priceless. And, if doing so gets you away from the anxiety of an Outlook inbox packed with email, even for just a few minutes, well, that may just be worth it all in the end. What other tips can you share for making a unique business impression? Please share below. With a bevy of free note-taking apps available for your iPad, why pay \$7.99 for Notes Plus? While it has a premium price, Notes Plus also comes with premium features such as a built-in browser and handwriting recognition that set it apart from less expensive offerings. Does it go far enough to justify the price? Read on. Setup Notes Plus is only available for iOS; after downloading the app, it opens into a tutorial on how to use it. There's no need to create an account or enter any personal information. Tips in the four-page tutorial are written as handwriting, which gives it a less formal feel, but looks a little jumbled and makes it harder to follow. MORE: Best Apps 2013 Interface Click to Enlarge Notes Plus does a good job of maximizing the amount of space you have to actually take notes. The majority of the screen is a lined notebook page. Along the top nav bar are tools such as an eraser, a text box tool and a typing tool. A Tools button in the upper left lets you browse your library of notebooks, create a new notebook, insert new pages or photos, make a notebook/page read-only and complete other functions. In portrait mode, a menu bar which is all but hidden on the left gives options to display your notebooks, record audio notes and trash unwanted notes. A button in the bottom left lets you adjust dozens of settings such as the frequency of auto saves, syncing with Dropbox and Google Drive and gestures. It even offers a left-handed mode (which we southpaws particularly appreciate). MORE: 40 Best Free Apps for iPhone Features Click to Enlarge As with other note-taking apps such as Evernote, Notes Plus users can choose their pen style, from thickness to opacity to color. If you find a combo you like, you can pin it to the Pen Style toolbar. To create a highlighter, you must lessen the stroke opacity and increase thickness; we wish there was a separate highlighter tool like in Noteshelf and Notability. You can also type notes using the iOS keyboard, and can choose your font, text color and font size. Use the eraser tool to get rid of what you don't like, or tap the Undo button to erase the last stroke you made. Click to Enlarge If you draw a shape, such as a square or circle, Notes Plus will automatically straighten the lines and place points at each corner, so you can change the dimensions of the shape. We could see this coming in handy for math or geometry notes, but we wish there was a graph paper option to go along with it. You can also choose from a list of shapes on the Tools menu. Another nice feature is a built-in Web browser, accessed by pulling the left-hand menu farther to the right. While the browser itself is fairly basic -- there are no tabs or bookmarks -- you can take a screen capture of as much or as little of a page as you want and copy it into a note. However, it saves the screen cap as an image, so hyperlinks won't work. You can also import photos from either the camera or their Camera Roll, and resize them in a note. Click to Enlarge Tap the Export button within Tools and you have the option to export the entire notebook or just the current page via PDF, image or Web archive. You can also autosync notes with Dropbox. We wish such apps as Noteshelf had this capability, although Evernote can sync notes across various platforms. MORE: Best Smartphones 2013 Want to make Notes Plus a little smarter? You can purchase Handwriting Recognition, which converts handwriting to text, for an additional \$1.99. Although Notes Plus is already the priciest of the bunch, it's the only note-taking app with this feature, which we could definitely see coming in handy when you don't feel like typing up the messy notes you scribbled down during class. Performance Click to Enlarge Writing in handwriting mode in Notes Plus was quick and efficient. There was almost no lag time with text, and we could easily use the eraser or Undo buttons to get rid of any errors. Although you can zoom in with Noteshelf, Paper and Notability, the Notes Plus zoom feature is unrivaled. Notes Plus lacks palm rejection, but users can pull up a palm pad from the bottom of the interface to keep the screen from shifting around as you jot notes. You can resize the palm pad to take up as much or as little of the display, but you must be deliberate when using the resizing tab; on more than one occasion, we accidentally drew a line on our page. Importing a photo from our iPad's Camera Roll was quick, and we liked that we could adjust a photo's size and move it to anywhere on the note. A recorded audio note was pretty clear, and we liked that we could record while taking notes; that way if you miss something you can always reference your recording. As with Evernote, this feature merely inserts an audio recording into a note, but you can use the microphone button on the keyboard for dictation. MORE: 10 Best iPhone Apps You're Not Using Verdict Click to Enlarge At \$7.99, Notes Plus is pricey, but it's one of the most comprehensive note-taking apps, offering a built-in browser, shape detection and even a left-handed mode. We also appreciate the handwriting recognition add-on, but it should be free instead of being another \$1.99. Overall, we prefer Notability, which gives you many of these same note-taking tools for \$1.99 and syncs with the cloud. But if Notes Plus' features are ones you can't live without, it's well worth the money. Top 10 Tablets Top 10 Smartphones 30 Apps for Rooted Android Phones The ever-useful wikiHow has posted a how to detailing the finer points of taking good lecture notes, splitting the process into what you need to do before, during, and after the lecture to be prepared and capture the "perfect" notes. These suggestions could probably apply for taking meeting notes as well, though your boss may or may not be as prepared at the lectern as your professors were (at least mine never have been). Either way, this has some good tips for what you need to pay attention to in order to get the most important points out of a lecture. For advice on note-taking systems (which this how to does not cover), check out Gina's recent feature on taking great notes. How to Take Perfect Lecture Notes [wikiHow]

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