



Your Money

Beating Debt—With A Little Help From Your Friends

(NAPSA)—It may soon pay to have friends and family—literally.

A new type of Web site lets people combine financial forces to help loved ones reach savings goals and get a handle on debt.

“Consumers racked up more than \$2.2 trillion in credit card purchases and cash advances last year alone, according to the public policy research firm, Demos,” says the site’s co-founder, Jon Gaskell. “But by making it easier and fun to save, we can help people become less reliant on credit cards and make their savings work for them.”

Strength In Numbers

Think of it as social banking. Like a social networking site, Gaskell’s site, called Smarty Pig.com, lets users choose to make their account “public,” allowing friends and family to help contribute to their savings goal (personal information is protected, helping to guard the account holder’s identity).

Users can have multiple savings accounts—one for a new TV and one for a family vacation, for instance—and each account receives the option of a “cash boost.” The boosts come from national retailers like Amazon.com, Home Depot or Best Buy, which provide the option of cashing out the savings in the form of a gift card with an increased value of up to 5 percent.

People can also receive their savings, plus interest, on a flexible SmartyPig MasterCard Debit Card that can be used anywhere

Valuable Relationships—“Social banking” lets friends and families help each other save for a goal.

MasterCard is accepted, including ATMs or by cashier’s check.

The accounts, which are held at West Bank, an FDIC-insured bank, are also bolstered by one of the most competitive interest rates in the industry.

Life Lessons

Increased savings aside, the Web site may offer one final—and valuable—benefit: It might help teach children to save.

While account owners must be 18 years old, parents can give minors access to specific goals, making the experience an educational and rewarding one for kids.

“Americans recently posted an annual savings rate of negative 1 percent,” says Gaskell. “So the sooner kids start learning to save, the better.”

For more information, visit www.SmartyPig.com.