

MANAGING YOUR MONEY

How To Pick The Perfect “Plastic”

(NAPSA)—An estimated 5.23 billion credit card solicitations landed in mailboxes throughout the country last year, according to Synovate Mail Monitor. In fact, 71 percent of American households report receiving more than five credit card offers per month. Although there is no one-size-fits-all choice when it comes to selecting a credit card, there are ways to navigate through the credit card offers you receive to help maximize your dollar. The following tips can help you pick your “plastic.”

Know your needs. Whether you want to save money for college, travel the world or make a donation to your favorite charity, there are a variety of credit cards that offer benefits to meet the needs of any lifestyle and budget.

- Frequent travelers may want to consider a card with a robust frequent-flier program, including several airlines, few blackout dates and partner programs that add to your miles.

- Those who get behind the wheel on a daily basis may look to a gasoline rebate card to increase their savings each time they fill up. For example, consumers who use the Shell MasterCard® from Citi® Cards earn one of the best rebates in the oil industry—a 5 percent rebate on Shell gasoline purchases. That’s 11 cents per gallon at \$2.35 per gallon. The card



also offers a 5 percent rebate on the first \$100 of daily Jiffy Lube purchases made with it and a 1 percent rebate on purchases everywhere else the card is used.

- Parents looking for ways to save for their child’s college education may want to consider a card that allows them to earn savings for college on everyday purchases, such as groceries and clothing. Then read the fine print.

Then read the fine print. From interest rates to membership fees to special policies, it’s important to read the terms and conditions of a credit card before determining whether to apply for the card.

- Compare the interest rate, Annual Percentage Rate (APR) and finance charges. These costs will be added to your bill if you don’t pay the amount in full each month.

- Compare annual membership fees, as well as late payment, bal-

ance transfer and over-the-credit-limit fees, which can add to up-front costs or monthly payments.

- Compare security-related features, such as identity theft assistance or zero liability protection. (Zero liability protection protects cardholders, free of charge, from any unauthorized transactions.)

Find out what else is in it for you. Credit cards not only allow you to pay for goods and services in a convenient manner, they can also provide additional benefits and special perks.

- Ask if credits to reward or rebate programs extend beyond one certain brand. Many cards have partnered with retailers, restaurants or nonprofit organizations to give cardholders more options to redeem their bonus points, miles or rebates.

- Find out if other services are offered free of charge. Cards such as the Shell Platinum Select MasterCard® from Citi® Cards offer online account management, Lost Wallet® Service, Travel Accident Insurance and Extended Warranty Protection, all free of charge.

By following these simple tips, consumers can put the right type of “plastic” in their wallets and become spenders who use credit wisely. For more information, visit the “Use Credit Wisely” Web site at www.usecreditwisely.com.