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Avidia Monthly



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In This Issue:

- ▣ **Home Financing Education Forum**
 - ▣ **Protecting Yourself from Wire Transfer Fraud**
 - ▣ **Personal Loans Versus Credit Cards**
Advantages and drawbacks of each type of lending
 - ▣ **To-Do List for Getting Finances in Order**
How to get financially organized
 - ▣ **What to Do Before You Seek Funding**
The importance of preparing prior to seeking funding for your small-business venture
 - ▣ **Hudson's 150th Celebration**
 - ▣ **Fun Earth Day Activities You Can Do With Your Kids**
A few ideas for teaching your child important lessons on Earth Day
 - ▣ **Vehicle Details: Perfect Summertime Vehicles**
You'll want to take the long road sitting behind the wheel in these
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Home Financing Education Forum

Are you thinking about buying a home? You'll want to attend the Home Financing Education Forum on April 6, at 5:30pm at Tatnuck Bookseller.

Get answers to several home buying topics such as:

- How does your credit score affect your interest rate and how you can improve it.
- What mortgage program truly fits your needs?
- Do you qualify for up to \$15,000 in down payment assistance?

Join us for an evening at Tatnuck Bookseller in Westborough. Refreshments will be served and we will be giving away a \$50 gift card to Tatnuck Bookseller!

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Protecting Yourself from Wire Transfer Fraud

There has been an increasing amount of wire transfer fraud occurring that impacts both individual consumers and businesses. Recently in Bedford, MA, multiple reports of email and phone scams have come into the Bedford Police. The email or phone call often requests the victim to wire money to them.

Similar reports of scams have also occurred in Billerica, where a victim was contacted on Facebook Messenger by someone claiming money was available to them from a government funded program.

Scammers may claim to be a family member, know a family member, a customer service representative from Microsoft, National Grid or even the IRS. They may also be someone that a victim is communicating to online through social media or an online dating site. They will convince the victim they are going through a hardship and request them to wire transfer them a large sum of money, typically internationally.

Remember, if it is too good to be true, it probably is. Also, if you have any doubt, you should contact the authorities immediately. Never provide personal information over the phone, email, or social media to anyone.

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Personal Loans Versus Credit Cards

Advantages and drawbacks of each type of lending

Personal loans and credit cards, should they be used intelligently, can be great ways to finance your wants and needs. As personal finance author Greg McFarlane writes on Investopedia.com, credit in general grants us temporary access to other people's money, and for a time, it is a win-win for all parties.

"The lenders get interest, the borrowers get leverage and the economy grows. What's not to love?" he said. "Without credit, capitalism would stagnate."

But which lending method is better: personal loans or credit cards? Let's look at some of the high points and low points of each.

Personal loans

This type of credit is unsecured, meaning there is no collateral involved. Because this is a higher risk for the lender, as there is nothing of which they can take possession in the event of default, interest rates are fairly high. And because you will have a balance to be paid from day one, you are paying that interest starting the moment you sign on the dotted line. Still, these interest rates are typically lower than those of most consumer credit cards, giving personal loans an advantage there.

Another advantage of a loan is that it comes with a set term during which you will be repaying it, and a set amount to pay, which helps with budgeting. At the same time, credit card terms are either longer or unspecified, allowing for lower, although inconsistent, payment amounts.

"Many personal loans have a payback period of no longer than 60 months, or five years. Credit cards tend to amortize your payment over eight to 10 years, resulting in a lower payment over a longer time," said debt adviser Steve Bucci of Bankrate.com.

Credit cards

While credit cards do come with inherently high rates — so high, in fact, that the president and Congress had to artificially cap those rates from outside the free market — for the first month after you purchase something on the card, you are technically getting a zero percent interest rate, McFarlane says.

"Should you choose to take 30 days or longer to pay for an item you bought on a credit card? Well, that's when you're failing to take advantage of the inherent benefit of the method of payment," he explains.



Furthermore, credit card companies often offer a grace period for payments. That means you have more than a month to come up with enough money to pay off your balance and avoid being charged

interest — that's at least two pay periods to gather your own money and use it to pay off the money you borrowed.

Also, not having to wait for paperwork approval when you need or want the money, as you do with loans, is yet another way your credit card acts just like cash (except in plastic form).

Exceptions to these details exist when you are talking about business loans or credit cards, or about personal loans obtained for use of credit card consolidation. Regardless of how you are using your means of credit, make sure you are looking carefully at the terms of the agreement. Let us help you choose the method that best suits your needs, and then take full advantage of its benefits.

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To-Do List for Getting 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 70 percent of Americans are living from paycheck to paycheck. 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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What to Do Before You Seek Funding

The importance of preparing prior to seeking funding for your small-business venture

Whether you are an entrepreneur with a new startup idea or a business veteran looking to expand, seeking funds is an important step for all entrepreneurs. To ensure that everything goes as smoothly as possible, here are some important things to make sure you've taken care of before you seek funding.

The first thing to do is take stock of your assets and determine your options for seeking funding. If you are starting a new business, you should add up what you have in savings and also the assets of anyone who you wish to go into business with. Not only does this mean you need to borrow a smaller sum, but it proves to lenders that you are serious about your business.

"It looks good to potential investors if you already have some skin in the game," states Jayson Demers, contributor to Entrepreneur.com. "Take whatever savings you can spare, and gather up some initial capital from friends and family, to show investors you already have some financial backing."



Next, you need to determine which funding source can best help you make up the difference between the money you have and what you need for your business.

Crowdfunding is becoming more popular, but it typically is successful at raising only small sums. Crowdfunding efforts that raise large amounts typically do so because they go viral online, and this same viral media coverage creates a false impression that this method is more common than it truly is. If you do want to give it a try, keep in mind that the most popular platform, Kickstarter, charges 5 percent if you reach your goal, and you have to pay another similar percentage (typically between 3 and 5 percent) to the company that processes the payments.

Venture capital is another source of funding that gets a lot of press in the media, but it is not a very common or reliable way for small-business owners to acquire the type of funding they typically need.

"Getting financing from [a venture capital fund] can be a high-wire dance," according to Kerry Hannon, contributor to Forbes. "But if you can do a little soft-shoe and have a great idea and terrific business plan, these types of investors will back you in exchange for equity or partial ownership."

Entrepreneurs who don't want to give up part of their business to an angel investor or a venture capitalist can seek funding in the form of a small-business loan. These loans have much better rates than credit cards and have terms that make them perfectly suited to the needs of small businesses. Small financial institutions typically prioritize lending to small businesses in a way that big chain banks

don't, so that is a great place to start.

Once you identify the best place for you to look for funding, you need to ensure you have everything in order. The first and most important step you need to complete prior to seeking funding is creating and perfecting a business plan. The U.S. Small Business Administration has tools and tips for building your business plan at <https://www.sba.gov/writing-business-plan>.

“You'll also need to make sure that you're capable of handling the first stages of development and business growth personally,” states Demers. “If you have years of experience in the industry or other proven credentials, you should be in good shape. Otherwise, you'll need to undergo training or secure outside resources to help you along.”

Making sure that you can enact the tasks outlined in your business plan will not only help your business make the most out of your funding, it will help you achieve funding in the first place. This makes the time spent gathering skills and experience well worth the effort.

Getting funding for a new business or for a project for your current business is an exciting prospect, so be sure not to let the excitement cause you to rush ahead. Carefully preparing prior to seeking funding will make the whole process go more smoothly and successfully.

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Hudson's 150th Celebration

Our headquarters is in Hudson, MA and we have a long history there! (147 years to be exact!) To help celebrate all things past and present for the 150th Celebration of Hudson, we have created a feed of all photos from Twitter, Vine and Instagram that use hashtag #HudsonMA! You can also upload photos right on our Facebook Page!

See the feed here.

Note: Photos are subject to approval in the feed for appropriate content. Approval may take 1 business day.

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Fun Earth Day Activities You Can Do With Your Kids

A few ideas for teaching your child important lessons on Earth Day

Earth Day is a great opportunity to make your child aware of their impact on the environment. To help encourage awareness, there are many fun and educational activities that you can share with kids of all ages. Here are a few suggestions to help teach your child the lessons of Earth Day.

Make a pine cone bird feeder

This rather simple activity, found at EnchantedLearning.com, requires only a few materials: a large pine cone, vegetable shortening or lard, oats or corn meal, bird seed and string. The string is tied around the pine cone, which is then covered with a mixture composed of 1/2 cup of shortening and 2 1/2 cups of oats. Once thoroughly covered, the pine cone is rolled in bird seed and hung from a tree branch. This formula can be repeated with multiple pine cones, drawing the attention of numerous birds nearby. Use this activity to teach your child about different kinds of birds and how they are important to the ecosystem .



Send e-cards to raise awareness among friends

Scholastic.com offers a number of e-cards that your child can send to friends and family to remind them of environmental issues. E-cards are the digital version of greeting cards that are sent via email. The e-cards cover four different themes—global climate change, endangered animals, pollution and methods for helping—that are each broken down into four facts. The e-cards can then be sent to a friend's email address, thus forgoing the need to print out a paper card. E-cards are available at <http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/explorations/kerc/ecards.htm>.

Donating food and reducing food waste

According to EPA.gov, the theme for Earth Day 2016 is food recovery, which includes reducing food waste and reallocating it from landfills through composting. To help your child understand the importance of not being wasteful, gather up nonperishable food items for donation to a nearby food bank. Teach your child about the alternatives to wasting food, including donation, feeding to animals and composting, as discussed in the EPA's Food Recovery Hierarchy.

By showing your child the positive effects of saving food and not being wasteful, they will be less likely to leave food on their plates after meals and more likely to find good uses for what they do not eat.

Playing games with an earth-friendly message

It can prove difficult to pry even young kids away from their electronic devices, but you can use this to your advantage in trying to impart an important message on Earth Day. Websites such as PrimaryGames.com offer numerous holiday-themed games suitable for children of all ages, including

several games that encourage recycling, saving energy and other environmentally-conscious behaviors. Since playing games on a tablet is often a solitary practice, be sure to sit with your child and guide their learning throughout, pointing out good behaviors and answering questions where necessary.

There are many things that you and your child can do on Earth Day. You can go for a walk in the park, pick up trash in your neighborhood or plant a new tree in the backyard. Whatever you choose to do, do not pass on the opportunity to teach your child important lessons about the earth and how to keep it green.

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Vehicle Details: Perfect Summertime Vehicles

You'll want to take the long road sitting behind the wheel in these

Driving during the summer is something people look forward to all year long. The warmer weather and longer days are reason enough to take an extra day off and spend some quality time enjoying all that nature has to offer. Here are a few vehicles that can help make your summer even more enjoyable.

2016 Jeep Wrangler

The Jeep Wrangler was named the "4x4 of the Decade" by Four Wheeler Magazine, and the "Off-Road Utility Vehicle of Texas" by the Texas Auto Writers Association, so you know it has the capability to handle nearly anything you throw its way. Whether you're looking to take your friends and a few surfboards to the beach or you're ready to head o

ff-road for some camping, the Wrangler can get you there. With its 3.6-liter engine for towing up to 3,500 pounds, enough space for just over 70 cubic feet of stuff, and features like the Sunrider® or the Freedom Top® top, you can get the benefits of a convertible with the Jeep utility you expect.

Edmunds says there is "plenty to love about this unique, characterful, capable and unabashedly all-American SUV."



2016 Nissan 370Z Roadster

For those who don't like blending in, the two-passenger 2016 Nissan 370Z® Roadster is a great choice. Top-down driving excitement comes courtesy of a 332-hp V6 engine paired with a six-speed manual transmission or a seven-speed automatic with Downshift Rev matching and manual shift mode.

Nissan has never been one to shy away from doing things a bit differently, and that's apparent with the styling of the 370Z Roadster. It's low and wide, with a shape that cheats the wind, aiding in fuel efficiency and improving the overall experience. Available features, including a Nissan Hard Drive Navigation system with voice recognition, climate-controlled sport seats and a Bose® audio system, make every drive more convenient and comfortable, too.

2016 Porsche Boxster

For enthusiasts, there is arguably no better sports car for the money than the Porsche Boxster. Named the "No. 1 Luxury Sports Car" by U.S. News & World Report, the 2016 Porsche Boxster has a blend of power, efficiency and driving dynamics that few others can match. And since it's a Porsche, customization options are abundant, from wheels and seats to audio systems and even exterior paint colors. Up to 375 horses thunder out of the Boxster six-cylinder engine, and after one test drive you'll be sure to want more.

"Stylish, luxurious and thrilling to drive, the 2016 Porsche Boxster comes up aces. Sports cars don't get much better than this," adds Edmunds.

2016 Fiat 500X

For something a bit different, you should consider the 2016 Fiat 500X. It's fun to drive, visually appealing and small enough to navigate the urban jungles of clogged metropolises, while still able to carry up to five people with plenty of room for your stuff. You can add all-wheel drive for even more performance and all-weather traction. But the best part of the 500X is its Italian design that doesn't require you to spend big bucks.

"Based on looks, price and value, the 2016 Fiat 500X has all the makings of a hit as an early entry into a rapidly expanding market segment," says Kelley Blue Book. "Even against competitors like the upcoming Honda HR-V and Mazda CX-3, the new Fiat 500X makes a good case for itself as an American Fiat. Stiff suspension or not, the combination of value and style will be hard to ignore."

There are plenty of good choices to help you enjoy your summer drives, but the best way to ensure you won't overpay is to get a loan from your financial institution. Rates are traditionally competitive, and once you're approved for a loan, you can shop for the car of your dreams with confidence.

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