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Increasing Branch Security

By: Barbara Mathey President/CEO, IBEW & United Workers Federal Credit Union

We are all being challenged in ways that we have never faced before. The homeless issue, increasing crime rates, and the lack of timely police response are major concerns. Your Credit Union takes your security and the security of our staff very seriously and we are always looking for ways to provide extra protection. We have enhanced our security camera system, reviewed the building's open hours, and are now taking the strongest step we can take by installing a card entry system. Designed to control branch entry, this system will require a Credit Union debit or credit card to unlock the branch entry door. By taking this action we will be able to admit Our Credit Union members only, lowering the chance of robbery or entry by unknown individuals. What this change means to our members are additional security and personalized service. We are recommending to all members that you check your Credit Union cards, verifying that they are current and not expired. If you need a new card, don't wait, contact the Credit Union so you will be prepared when the new system goes live. For those members that prefer not to carry cards, we will still have the drive-thru open and in emergency situations, you will be able to call the Credit Union, answer a few questions to verify your identity and we will come to the door and let you in. We anticipate the system to be up and running in about 2 months. It is our wish that every member and team member feel just a little safer when coming into the Credit Union.

While we are talking about security, I thought I would remind everyone that fraud attempts are continuing to rise, and we need to be vigilant. Do not answer the phone unless you know who the caller is and never give out personal information of any kind to an incoming caller. Always be aware of your surroundings and the people coming and going around you and keep your personal property securely in your grasp. Review your account information and transactions daily and report any suspicious activity to the Credit Union immediately. And, finally, be careful when online, don't respond to pop-up ads. Sign on to authentic websites and be sure that any information you are giving is secured.

We encourage everyone to use caution, exercise a little more care, and save your trust for those situations that truly deserve it.

Ways To Organize Your Financial Accounts and Bills Online

Get your finances together and get a clear picture of how your money is working

Want to get yourself on the path to financial stability and independence? Organization is the key. Getting your finances in order isn't just smart — it's easy to do thanks to a wide range of convenient online tools at your disposal.

Take inventory of accounts and passwords

If you have an online account with your financial institution or a lender, you have a username and password. As U.S. News & World Report contributor Teresa Mears writes, organizing your accounts includes tracking these usernames and passwords and safely storing them.

To safeguard this sensitive information, you can create an encrypted spreadsheet and protect it via password. You can also use a service like LastPass, which stores usernames and passwords safely. While you're at it, set a calendar reminder to update your passwords for these accounts every 90 days or so as it can help protect you against identity theft.

Go paperless

Your financial institution makes it easier to keep track of money going in and out of your account with online banking and bill pay. Because you can handle nearly all facets of your finances on the computer, that's exactly where you should leave the paperwork.

Jennifer Calonia, a contributor to Yahoo! Finance, recommends opting into your financial institution and lenders' paperless options. Not only does going paperless reduce clutter and environmental waste, but it also makes it easier to keep track of monthly statements and routine bill payments.

With online banking, you can easily see your account history, view payments and deposits, and monitor balances, all without receiving a single piece of mail. Better still, not having your information printed and mailed to you can help lessen your risk of identity fraud.

Automate your payments

Nothing can damage your credit score quite like missing monthly bill payments. To avoid having to do the guesswork, Mears suggests automating bill payments using your lender or credit card provider's website or app.

By setting up automatic payments, it becomes easier to create a consistent monthly budget. It also helps eliminate the possibility that you'll miss a payment, which could have a major impact on your credit score. While automating payments should move money automatically, you'll still want to be diligent about checking your statements to make sure everything has gone through as planned.

You can even use this same approach to build good saving habits. Some financial institutions offer rules in their apps and websites that will automatically move money into your savings account on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly basis. This ensures that you're still working toward your savings goals.

Organize and consolidate

Intuit Mint Life contributor Zina Kumok writes that one of the best ways to eliminate debt is to organize it. If you have loans, credit cards, or other types of outstanding debt, create a list using a spreadsheet and include information like how much you owe, how much you pay each month, the interest rate, and the remaining term.

You can use this information not just to get a grasp of your debts, but to devise a strategy for paying them down. Whether you decide to focus on the debt with the highest interest rate or the shortest term is up to you. If you have multiple lines of credit card debt, NerdWallet contributors Steve Nicastro and Jackie Veling suggest options like a balance transfer or credit card consolidation loan. Not only will these approaches help minimize costs in the long run, but they'll also streamline your accounts for easier management.

If you're having trouble getting a handle on your financial situation, talking to a professional can help you gain perspective and put everything in order. Once you've built systems and patterns that are hard to break, you'll find yourself firmly on top of your finances and on the way to greater peace of mind.



Pre-Qualified vs. Preapproved: What's the Difference?

Understanding how preapproved and pre-qualified differ

Financial jargon can be confusing, especially when certain terms sound weirdly similar. Take pre-qualified and preapproved, for example. These words appear to be synonyms, but when it comes to securing a mortgage, they have differences and specifically applied circumstances. Here is a closer look at the variances between pre-qualified and preapproved and when each one applies.

Pre-qualified

When you're shopping for a home, most likely you'll need to secure financing to determine what you can and should afford. The first step to realize your homebuying dreams involves pre-qualifying. A lender will evaluate your finances and determine your qualifying loan amount.

"Getting pre-qualified involves supplying a bank or lender with their overall financial picture, including debt, income, and assets. The lender reviews everything and gives an estimate of how much the borrower can expect to receive. Pre-qualification can be done over the phone or online, and there's usually no cost involved," according to Jean Folger, writer for Investopedia.com.

Although the pre-qualification process involves working with a financial institution, it is not an official determination you can take to a seller. It doesn't include a credit history report, but it does provide invaluable information to get the ball rolling on the homebuying process.

You'll have a clearer picture of where you are and where you need to be as well as give you the necessary data to start discussing mortgage options.



Preapproved

If pre-qualification seems like dipping your toe into water, the preapproval process is more like cannonballing. You'll have to supply financial documents, just like during a pre-qualification process, but this time you'll need a credit history check. This step not only shows your current financial status but also gives a glimpse into how reliable you are at satisfying mortgage payments. The process takes at least 30 minutes, and you may have to wait a few days before you find out the results, according to Barbara Marquand, writer for Nerdwallet.com.

"The lender will verify your income, employment, assets and debts, and will check your credit report. You'll provide information in the form of W-2s, a current pay stub, a summary of your assets and your total monthly expenses, and, if you already own real estate, a copy of your mortgage statement," she adds.

With this process, you'll get more than just information like during pre-qualification. You'll receive a preapproval letter, which you should supply to your real estate agent. This information will help them seek out real estate options in your reach, according to Marquand.

"Sellers will also want to know that you're preapproved. Virtually no offer to buy a home without mortgage preapproval will be considered in today's market, unless the buyer is paying 100% in cash," she adds.

What's right for you?

Both the pre-qualification and preapproval steps are important to your home-buying process. But you can jump to the preapproval step if you are serious about purchasing a home and not just toying with the prospect, according to Marquand. If you're eager to trade in your rental agreement for a mortgage, then get your paperwork in order and get the preapproval process going.

No matter where you are in your home-buying journey, make sure you take the time to get your paperwork in order and partner with financial institutions and a real estate agent you trust.

5 Ways to Save on Your Next Vacation

Tips to save money when planning a vacation

If you are ready to get away from the daily grind and recharge on a vacation, you know that planning ahead is key, especially if you're working with a limited budget. Here are a few tips to help you save money for your next vacation.

Set aside funds

Whether it's an extended weekend at a luxury hotel, a glamping trip, a trek to a family-friendly amusement or water park, or a flight-necessary getaway to a foreign land, it's important to start saving up as soon as possible. The best way to build your vacation fund is to open an account dedicated to your adventure, according to Sarah Kuta, contributor to ThePennyHoarder.com.

"Set up automatic payments into the account, and with a little restraint, leave that money there until it's time for your trip. Bulk up your account balance by depositing any \$1 or \$5 bills that you receive as change from everyday purchases. Funnel any extra money — like a work bonus or birthday cash — into your vacation fund as well," she adds.

Investigate pricing and deals

Once you have determined the dates of your vacation, it's time to outline the activities and attractions you and your family want to experience and of course, where you'll be resting your heads after a long day of fun and exploration. With thoughtful research and a thorough understanding of your trip's big ticket items, you can have a better estimate of your vacation's total cost. Don't forget to calculate for transportation — if you're flying, you'll probably need to factor in the cost for a rental car or the cost of your destination's public transit fees, too.

"Block off a few hours on an evening or weekend for detailed research. Use multiple online booking and price-comparison sites to narrow down what you're likely to spend on each major item given your origin, destination, travel times, and expectations for quality and comfort," according to Brian Martucci, writer for MoneyCrashers.com.

You also want to have a contingency fund set aside for unexpected fees for items such as baggage and taxes, he adds.

Ask for a break

You are a loyal customer and the companies you've patronized for years should be reminded of your commitment! It may seem a little unnerving at first to ask your cell phone provider or your car insurance company for a discount or a break on your current plan, but the worst they can say is no.

"Be kind, but firm when bargaining with the customer service representatives," according to Joni Sweet and Lisa Milbrand, writers for RealSimple.com. "Spending 20 minutes on the phone could help you come up with another \$20 per month to toss into your travel fund."

Take on a side hustle

The current "gig" economy has opened up opportunities for many people looking to earn extra money or forge a nontraditional career path. If you have extra time to pursue a side gig, it may get you that much closer to the vacation of your dreams, suggests Kuta. There are plenty of online sites dedicated to such entrepreneurial endeavors, which could be a great match to your availability, skills, and talents.

Takeaways

When you've arrived and are in vacation mode, be sure your hard work at saving isn't obliterated. When it comes to buying souvenirs or splurging on gifts, have a firm budget in mind. You can always purchase a memento online before or after the trip, which can help you save, advises Trent Hamm, writer for U.S. News & World Report. Other low-cost ways to come away with a tangible memory of your vacation include taking photos and creating a scrapbook after the trip or collecting found items like rocks or seashells (as long as it's legal to do that!), he adds.

Getting away from it all, whether it's for a few or many days, is essential to recharging your spirit, reconnecting with family, and making unforgettable memories. These five tips will help you manage financial challenges so you can embark on an adventure with less stress and more funds in your pocket!



Must-Try Accessories for Improving Your Sleep

Seeking more restful slumber? Check out these sleep products

If a good night's sleep is hard to come by, Harvard Medical School recommends cultivating habits like regular exercise and consistent bedtimes while avoiding electronics, alcohol, and caffeine right before bed. You can also improve your sleep by turning your bedroom into a more relaxing environment — and these accessories are a great place to start.

A new mattress

You spend about a third of your life in your bed — so don't neglect its condition. If your mattress is 6-8 years old or older, damaged, making you feel achy and sore, or triggering your allergies, Sleep Foundation suggests shopping for a high-quality replacement to reap the benefits of better sleep. The right mattress can work wonders, helping you sleep more deeply, giving your body the support it needs, and reducing pain.



Better pillows and linens

Selecting the right pillows and linens for your bed is essential for getting a good night's sleep. When you choose a pillow, consider factors like the material it's filled with (for example, down or memory foam), its firmness and thickness, the support it provides for your preferred sleeping position, and whether it's designed to keep you cool as you sleep. When it comes to sheets, comforters, and blankets, consider the feel and comfort of the material, and make sure its breathability matches whether you run hot or cold when you sleep. Cleanliness is important, too, so make sure the pillows and linens you use are easy to launder.

Blackout curtains and eye masks

Making your bedroom as dark as possible will help your brain accept that it's time to go to sleep. For starters, it's a good idea to eliminate glowing electronics and other light sources from your sleeping area if at all possible. After that, installing blackout curtains or blinds will help to banish outside light from your bedroom. And if blackout curtains aren't the right solution for you, a sleep mask is a good way to achieve a similar light-blocking effect.

Blue light blockers

Even if you've eliminated light sources from your bedroom, watching television, using your computer, and playing with your smartphone within two hours before bedtime can undermine these efforts. Per Healthline, that's because electronic devices confuse your brain by emitting sleep-disruptive blue light. Fortunately, many products are available to counteract the effects of blue light, including apps that filter it from your computer or phone screen and special light-blocking glasses you can wear before bedtime.

A sleep app for your smartphone

Instead of letting your smartphone keep you awake, help it lull you to sleep instead. You can download a wide range of sleep apps geared to your specific needs. Some of these provide insights into your sleep habits, helping you avoid bad ones and cultivate good ones. Others provide meditation routines, music, and calming stories to ease and clear your mind as you wind down for the night.

Sleep is absolutely essential for good physical and mental health. If you're struggling to nod off in a timely manner or achieve the deep slumber you need to recharge your body and mind, trying these accessories can be a great way to improve the quality of your sleep each night.

