



THE SAVVY CONSUMER COLUMN

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Shoppers should remember these tips when buying gift cards

NASHVILLE, TN – Gift cards are handy presents – especially for people who seem to have at least one of everything. But for all the conveniences of gift cards, they often come with fine print that can make them less than perfect.

Here's how consumers can keep that gift card's policies from spoiling their gift giving.

- **Check expiration dates and fees.** In Tennessee, expiration dates, fees and other terms must be clearly disclosed at the time of purchase. The expiration date and fee must be legibly printed on the gift card.
- **Ask about restrictions.** Some card issuers deduct a monthly fee from the card or apply inactivity fees if a card has not been used for a period of time. These fees reduce the value of the card. Some gift cards do not allow cash refunds for a remaining balance on a card. You will have to either forfeit the balance or buy additional items.
- **Know what it will cost.** Major shopping mall operators charge fees for gift cards. Gift cards issued by banks and credit card companies often expire and tend to add fees. Fees – including activation fees, transaction fees, maintenance fees and inactivity fees – can lessen a card's value.
- **Ask what to do if the card is stolen.** Always keep a receipt. Since gift cards are not usually registered to an individual purchaser, they can be easily stolen. Some stores urge customers to access their website and register cards in case they are stolen.
- **Check on purchase exemptions.** Ask if the card may be used at both a store's physical location and the store's website. Also, ask if the card may be used at other locations and not just the specific store where the card was purchased.
- **Get as much information as possible for the card's recipient.** Ask for a toll-free phone number in case there are problems with the gift card. In addition, ask if a website that provides gift card details is available.

To file a complaint with the Division of Consumer Affairs, visit <http://tn.gov/consumer/complaint.shtml>.

Consumer Affairs (www.tn.gov/consumer/) is a division of the Department of Commerce and Insurance (www.tn.gov/commerce/), which works to protect consumers while ensuring fair competition for industries and professionals who do business in Tennessee.
