

M&T Bank Offers 5 Financial Tips for a Healthy Holiday Budget

BUFFALO, N.Y.—With Black Friday and Cyber Monday quickly approaching, M&T Bank’s certified financial planners are encouraging consumers to stick to a holiday budget to avoid unmanageable credit card bills in January.

The National Retail Federation expects consumers to spend more than \$602 billion this holiday season. With the impact of the government shutdown on consumer confidence, some industry analysts expect retailers to pull out all the stops to increase consumer spending.

“Over-spending or making big impulse purchases during the holidays can result in other financial goals or priorities being thrown off track in the New Year—and beyond,” said Sam Guerrieri, senior vice president for wealth advisory services at M&T Bank. “The key is to be an educated consumer. By providing financial advice to help consumers better manage money, we hope our customers will feel more in control of their finances during the holidays.”

To keep your finances on track this holiday season, M&T Bank’s financial planners suggest these five tips:

1. **Crunch the numbers.** First and foremost, stick to a budget. Decide on a realistic dollar amount of how much you are comfortable spending during the holidays. No idea how much to set aside? Our certified financial planners recommend a target of no more than 1.5 percent of your annual income on holiday spending.
2. **Budget for everything.** After you’ve got your holiday budget, make a broad list of holiday expenses (gift buying, shipping, travel to visit family, at-home entertaining, decorating, etc.). Factoring in every expense makes it easier to avoid purchases that can burden you with holiday debt in the New Year.
3. **Be credit wise.** Don’t bring all of your credit cards when you shop. If you must use a credit card, bring one with a limit that meets your holiday budget and comes with shopping perks, like cash back bonuses or discounts from retail partners.
4. **No emotional purchases.** Learn the art of comparison shopping. Make sure the prices online and in-store really are a bargain, as well as using coupons and other discounts that could reduce the total price even further. An hour invested in comparison shopping on the Internet will save you time and money.
5. **Track your spending.** Keep a running total of each purchase to make sure you don’t exceed the limit of your budget or your bank account. This way, if you go over with a large gift purchase, you can reign in your spending in another area. There are a number of mobile apps and computer programs designed to help consumers track their spending.

As a gift to yourself, start using a savings account in January to put a little bit of money away every month for the holidays in 2014.

The tips are part of M&T’s continuing approach to help consumers improve their financial fluency and develop good spending habits through counseling and financial education. For more information and educational tools on smart spending, visit www.mtb.com/answerzone. For shopping discounts available through national retailers when you pay for your purchases with an M&T Bank debit card or M&T Visa credit card, visit www.mtb.com/shopping.

About M&T Bank

M&T Bank was founded in Buffalo, New York in 1856, and is one of the top 20 independent commercial bank holding companies in the U.S., with \$84 billion in assets and more than 725 branch offices in New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia.

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