



Are You Getting the Most from Your Bank?

With banks competing for your business, you now have several choices and opportunities to “shop

around” for the bank that offers you the products and services that best suit your lifestyle and financial circumstances.

In today’s fast-paced environment, some people are looking toward financial institutions that exist solely over the Internet and have no presence in your local community. It would be advisable to make sure that you know the web-based financial institution is legitimate and not a scammer. If you decide to bank solely via the Internet, you will have the advantage of added convenience, but will lose:

- Face-to-face contact with a personal banker who can best explain the services and products that meet your needs.
- A personal banker who knows you and would better understand your loan needs.

You also may need to rely on the mail to sign important documents, make deposits or conduct other business.

With a competitive financial market, you probably receive offers every week inviting you to open a new account. For example, XYZ Bank will “give” you a “free” computer or other incentive if you open an account. Before rushing down to take advantage of this “offer”, consider the following:

- Do you really need the “free” gift?
- According to a 2005 report from the FDIC, banks are required by law to report the fair market value of the gift as income. If you receive items in one year with a total value of more than \$10, that value will also be reported as income and taxed accordingly.

- Be sure to read the fine print to determine what you could lose if you fail to meet all of the terms of the account offer.

Here are some things to consider when choosing a checking account that is best for you:

- Will you be writing a lot of checks each month? If so, you need to choose an account that doesn’t impose fees on the number of checks you write.
- Do you prefer paying bills online instead of writing and mailing checks each month? If so, make sure your bank provides online banking services.
- Is there a minimum balance requirement and what is the penalty if your account drops below that amount?
- Will your account earn interest?
- What are the bank fees for overdrafts?
- Does the bank have branch locations near to where you live or work?

And always remember the importance of a long-term relationship with your community banker to make sure you receive the best fees, rates and services to meet your financial needs!

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