



Consumer Advisory

Gift Cards: OCC Provides Tips for Consumers

Before you purchase a gift card for someone—or use one you receive as a gift—the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency wants you to know some things about the terms and conditions associated with gift cards. The following information discusses some of the most important terms and conditions that you should understand, and that must be disclosed to you.

Fees. Make sure you know what fees may apply to the card. Some gift cards may not have fees; others charge various types and amounts of fees. Some fees are simply deducted from the value on the card, while others must be paid separately. These fees may include:

- **Purchase fees** that are charged when you buy a gift card. These are in addition to the money you pay in exchange for the value on the card.
- **Inactivity, dormancy, or service fees** that may apply only if there has been no activity on the card for at least one year. By law, only one dormancy, inactivity, or service fee may be imposed in any calendar month.
- **Transaction fees** for using the or all transactions, for a large number of transactions, or for certain types of transactions, for example, ATM withdrawals.
- **Miscellaneous fees** for balance inquiries, adding funds to the card, replacing a lost or stolen card, or other services related to the card.

Disclosures. Check the disclosures, which must be provided by gift card issuers when you purchase the gift card, for information about the type, amount, and frequency of any fees that apply to the gift card. If you have questions about the fees that apply to a

particular gift card, call the toll-free telephone number or access the Web site address on the gift card for fee information.

Expiration dates. Make sure you know whether there is an expiration date for the card and what that expiration date is. By law, gift cards issued after August 22, 2010, may not expire for at least five years after purchase. Any money that is added to a gift card may not expire for at least five years after the value is added to the card. If a gift card expires, and there is still money left on the card, you should find out whether the card can be reissued with a new expiration date.

Expiration information should be stated on the gift card itself (or its packaging) along with a toll-free number or Web site that will provide this information and that you can use to ask about obtaining a replacement card.

Lost or stolen cards. You should also find out the rules for lost or stolen cards. Can you get a replacement card? Would there be a fee for doing so? If someone else uses the card after it is lost or stolen, would that money be credited to the replacement card?

- If this information is not stated on the gift card itself or on its packaging, use the toll-free number or Web site provided to obtain this information.
- Important reminder: Keep the receipt for the gift card purchase, and write down the card number. These may be needed if you, or the person who received the card as a gift, needs a replacement card.



Where the card can be used. A store gift card often can be used only at the store where it was purchased or at related stores. Other gift cards, like those affiliated with the American Express, Discover, MasterCard, or VISA systems, can be used at many locations around the world. Some gift cards can even be used to get cash at an ATM.

Trust. Remember that a gift card is like a loan. You are giving money to the company that holds the value of the card until it is used, and the company promises to give that money back when the card is used. Make sure you trust the company standing behind that promise, and remember that you are

putting your trust in that company—and its financial stability.

Problems and complaints. If your gift card is not working properly, or you have some other problem with your gift card, call the toll-free number or access the Web site listed on the card or packaging.

One final note to purchasers of gift cards. If more complete information about fees, expiration dates, or other matters appears on a document separate from the gift card itself, pass that important information on to the recipient of the card to protect its value.