



## THE SAVVY CONSUMER COLUMN

**The Savvy Consumer**  
**Mary Clement, Director, Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs**

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**CONTACT:** D. Christopher Garrett  
or Shannon Ashford  
615-741-6007

### **Holiday 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. During the winter shopping season, a gift card can be ideal. A gift card is one size fits all and the recipient gets what he or she wants from a retailer or restaurant.

But for all the conveniences of gift cards, they often come with fine print that can make them less than perfect. There are two types of gift cards. Retail gift cards are sold by retailers and restaurants and can only be used with those merchants. Retail cards may have expiration dates or a fee for inactivity. Bank gift cards carry the logo of a payment card network like Visa or MasterCard and can be used at any location accepting cards from that network. There are more likely to be fees for activation, maintenance or transactions on bank gift cards.

Here's how consumers can keep gift card policies from dumping snow on gift-giving this winter:

1. **Check expiration dates and fees.** In the state of 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.
2. **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 will 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.
3. **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.
4. **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're stolen.
5. **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, not just the specific store where the card was purchased.
6. **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. Ask if a website that provides gift card details is available.

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