



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Christmas...Get Real!

Saint John, New Brunswick, December 3, 2008 – Are you looking for ways to stay out of financial trouble this Christmas? Try a spending plan everyday consumers can use to get through Christmas in these tough economic times.

“When consumers have a simple planning strategy for Christmas spending it can often make a huge impact on how they will start the New Year.” says John Eisner, President of Credit Counselling Services of Atlantic Canada, Inc. an Atlantic Canadian non profit organization whose mission is to help consumers with their financial difficulties all year. “Following a step by step approach is important this year, more than ever, with so much economic uncertainty.” continued Mr. Eisner.

Enclosed is a start to finish success plan for families to give within their means. You’ll find priceless tips and worksheets than can be tailored to all consumers regardless of income. Remember, budgeting is not about having less; it’s about doing more with what you have.

This blueprint has been developed, in part, due to the thousands of consumers counseled at Credit Counselling Services of Atlantic Canada, Inc. since its inception in 1994.

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Tips to Keep Holiday Spending Within Your Financial Boundaries

If January mail brings huge bills as reminders you overspent for the holidays, consider developing a written budget this year. Decide how much you can afford for holiday gifts. Then, prioritize people on your gift list with an estimated dollar amount for each person. Don't forget to budget for related expenses including food for special meals and entertaining, holiday outfits, decorations, greeting cards and postage, wrapping paper and travel.

Next, write down how much money you can afford to spend on each part of the holiday expenses list. See if the total expenditures fall within your holiday budget. If not, you might have to adjust expenses by giving less expensive gifts, giving fewer gifts, or entertaining less.

Be sure to develop a written holiday budget, rather than commit it to memory, otherwise you might forget to include holiday expenses in the budget. Take the budget when you go shopping to help you keep track of what you spend on each item and the total amount spent.

There are several ways to make up the difference between what you can spend and what you want to spend. If the list of your family and friends is too long, consider adjusting the amount of money allocated for gifts or suggest drawing names. Another way to reduce gift costs is to think of non-cash gifts. Give people with small children a gift certificate for a free night of babysitting or offer to do some minor home repairs if you're "handy" around the house. Take elderly people out to lunch and shopping, or offer to run errands for them.

Invite some friends over to make cookies or other baked items each of you can give as holiday gifts. Make large quantities of soup, chilli or stew and freeze small portions to give as a gift. Since magazines often have special holiday deals, give a subscription related to someone's hobby or interests. Shop for very young children at yard sales, used bookstores or toy stores.

If the volume of items in stores makes it hard for you to stick to your budget, consider shopping by catalogue. This can help you stick to your budget as well as avoid holiday crowds. When catalogue shopping, remember to include the shipping charges in your budget.

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A little advanced planning will help your holiday budget next year. Take a part-time job, or work overtime for a few months to earn extra spending money for the holidays. Better yet, take on extra work during the year and save this money for the holidays.

Start saving for next year by putting aside money from each pay cheque. If you don't have the discipline to regularly save on your own, join an interest-bearing holiday savings club at your bank, savings and loan association, or credit union.

Find out what people on your gift list like and shop throughout the year for these items. This will give you time to comparison shop for the best selections and bargain prices. Shopping during the year will also enable you to spread expenses out, rather than having to pay for everything in just a few months.

Take advantage of seasonal sales. Many stores have year-end sales during the holiday season. You can find bargain gifts at these sales and stock up on items for next year such as wrapping paper, greeting cards, decorations and holiday outfits.

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Holiday Gift List – Budget Worksheet			
Gift List	Gift Ideas	Budgeted Gift Cost	Actual Gift Cost
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			
15.			
16.			
17.			
18.			
19.			
20.			
Adjust “Budgeted Gift Cost” entries as needed; if you spend extra on one person you will need to spend less on another...		Total Budgeted	Subtotal:
			Total Cost:

Remember – it’s the thoughtfulness of the gift that really means the most...not the price!

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Holiday Expenses – Budget Worksheet		
Holiday Expense List	Budgeted Cost	Actual Cost
Gifts for Family		
Gifts for Friends		
Gifts for Neighbours, Teachers, Coworkers, etc		
Holiday Tips for Service People		
Charity		
Cards		
Postage Stamps		
Home Decorations		
Flowers		
Christmas Tree Decorations		
Baking Supplies		
Food Containers		
Gift Wrap and Gift Bags		
Gift Package Shipping Costs		
Party Supplies		
Holiday Food		
Thank You Cards (and more stamps)		
Adjust “Budgeted Cost” entries as needed; if you spend extra in one area you will need to spend less in another...	Total Budgeted	Subtotal:
		Total Cost:

It's really the thoughtfulness and love you share during the holidays that means the most – not how well your house is decorated or how much you spend on gifts.

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