



Thrifty Thoughts

Webwatch discovers ways to help you save your money.

Heidi Griepp

In the midst of the uncertain economy, many of us are looking for new and creative ways to stretch our funds. This month Webwatch looks at websites that help you save money, spend less, and live more frugally.

Getting started with budgets

static.oprah.com/download/pdfs/money/money_pie_chart.pdf

It's great to jump right in and try to be more frugal, but if you don't have a clear understanding of your finances, your frugality isn't connected to specific goals. Having a clear picture of your overall finances is important as you take steps to save money. There are multiple spending tools out there to help do this, but one easy way to start a budget is to use a percentage pie chart. I chose this pie chart from Oprah.com because the url is easy to find. (You can also find it by Googling "spending pie chart." It's the first option that comes up.) The pie chart is a suggested spending plan, based entirely on percentages of your income. For example, it identifies housing costs (including repairs, taxes, utility bills) as a suggested 35 percent of your total income. Other categories of expenses are identified as well.

The latte factor

www.finishrich.com/free_resources/docs/LFWorksheet.pdf

www.finishrich.com/free_resources/lattecalculator.php

Before we get to specific advice websites, let's talk about lattes. I was wandering around the Yahoo! Finance area and saw this statement: "Everyone has heard of 'the latte factor.'" But I had not, so I found David Bach who coined the phrase. He says, "How much money you have is not related to how much you earn, but how much you spend." The general idea is that no matter what our salary is, we spend lots of money on little things (like lattes) that impact our budgets more than we realize. If we were able to cut down on those little expenses, we could save a lot of money in a given year. This worksheet can help you track your "latte factor." Go to the second link for the online latte factor calculator to find out what investing your small savings can do for you.

Living frugally

There are several web communities that talk about living frugally. They include discussions about coupons, living simply, ways to get free stuff, and ideas about how to swap your way

to items you need. All three of the sites listed below include posts about how to observe the holidays more frugally.

frugalliving.about.com

Must reads here include: top ten ways to start living frugally, how to create a frugal budget, how to get rid of credit card debt, recession-proof your finances, and what is frugal living? There are also topics to browse, like household savings.

frugal.families.com/blog

This community site is part of the families.com website. Frugal categories include: baby and child, beauty, frugal cleaning (including how to make your own cleaning supplies), frugal family fun, date nights, and more.

www.frugalvillage.com

Popular sections here are: tutorials, frugal family fun, fun games, budget Christmas, make it yourself, pantry list, dumpster diving, garage sale tips, and budget romance.

Coupons and frugal eating

coupons.com

couponing.about.com

coolsavings.com

www.grocerycouponguide.com

coupons.smartsource.com

www.retailmenot.com/coupons/food

Check out these websites for online coupons. Some of them require you to enter your email address so they can email you the coupons based on your zip code. Others ask only for your zip code to access the coupons. There are some duplicates, but these links will get you started. When using coupons, try not to buy something just because you have a coupon for it. Watch for items you actually use, and then see if you can find multiple coupons.

www.flbyu.blogspot.com

This is just one of a few blogs where the blogger watches for all kinds of coupons and shares them with you. It's a great place to look around. The blogger calls herself a savings specialist.

www.restaurant.com

In addition to using coupons when you shop for groceries, you can also save money when you eat out. Restaurant.com helps you save

money at local restaurants. First you need to find the restaurants in your area. Then you buy a gift card online at a savings. For example, you can buy a \$25 gift certificate to a restaurant for only \$10. Some inexpensive restaurants also have a \$10 gift certificate that you can purchase for \$3. Once you've purchased the gift certificate, print it out and take it with you to the restaurant. This is also a good idea if you are going to be visiting a city on vacation. I found that it worked better to search by zip code here than by city.

Thrifty shopping

When buying anything online, make sure to look for used products first. Sometimes you can even trade things. Here are just a few of the places you can buy used items or trade online.

www.craigslist.org

www.ebay.com

www.amazon.com

These popular websites have a lot of resources for buying things used. They are great for everything from textbooks to electronics equipment.

www.freecycle.org

The goal of the Freecycle Network is to reduce waste by connecting people who are throwing away goods with others who are seeking them. These are networks that you can join for free and then you can view items being given away in your area.

General tips on how to save money

www.wikihow.com/save-money

Need more tips? I've recommended the wikiHow website before. I am coming back to it because this article has a lot of good information to get you started saving money.

Remember, "always overestimate your expenses and underestimate your income." □

Know of a great site you think should be here?
Tell us about it—email heidi.griep@covchurch.org.

EXTRA LINKS

Tiphero.com

www.kiplinger.com

www.bargainist.com/deals/2007/07/ideas-for-saving-

money-on-eating-out

zenhabits.net/2007/08/the-cheapskate-guide-50-tips-for-frugal-living

frugalrecipes.wordpress.com

Don't buy it; make it

www.instructables.com/id/E73NTH6U7TEP-2871NW

Frugal holidays

frugal.families.com/blog/eight-frugal-things-to-do-for-christmas

www.newdream.org/holiday/index.php

Frugal travel

www.yapta.com

www.SkyAuction.com

moments-notice.com

us.lastminute.com

Heidi Griep is manager of Covenant Internet Services and an avid Web wanderer.