



## — Holiday Budgeting & Spending —

I recently had a conversation with my 6-year-old son and he asked me what he could buy with a five dollar bill he had received from his Grandpa. When he asked if he could get a remote-control car, I said “You can’t afford that with five dollars.” Then, he asked for some new basketball shoes, and again I said, “You can’t buy that with five dollars.” Next, he suggested an ice-cream and I said “Yes, you might even be able to get two!” It made me reflect on what five dollars can buy these days and my own purchasing habits. With the holiday season right around the corner, it is a good time to think about budgeting and our spending habits. As my family has grown from two to five members over the past six years, I have quickly realized how holiday shopping can be overwhelming and quite expensive! My wife and I try to plan for the holiday season by setting a realistic budget, thoughtful gift giving and utilizing sales, specifically online and rebates. I hope these tips can help you too!

### Set A Realistic Budget

Make a budget by reviewing your expenses and savings, making sure you set a realistic amount for what you are looking to spend during the holiday season. Remember to not only include gifts, but to also remember special activities such as travel, parties, dinners and drinks, especially if you are hosting. These events can be costly if not budgeted correctly.

### Plan Out Thoughtful Gift Giving

Remember it’s not always about the cost of the gift, but the thought that counts. I know that some of the best gifts I have received from my family have cost nothing at all.

Things such as:

- Handwritten notes
- Quality time
- Home-cooked meals

These are great examples of what you can do to give quality gifts without breaking the bank. Really step back and think, “What would this person like?”

Additionally, when shopping for gifts, always remember to start early and avoid last minute gift grabbing. Experts say one of the worst things you can do this season is to hop

on to Amazon or run to Walmart and browse until you find something that person might like. This last minute strategy will likely not have that much thought or character behind it.

### Utilize Online Sales and Rebates

I love to find deals. For years I would get up early with my family and wait in line on Black Friday to get the best deal out there. In more recent years, I have switched over to focusing on online purchasing instead of heading to the stores on Black Friday. I think this will be extra helpful this year with all of the COVID-19 restrictions in place. I always start with websites like Rakuten and Google Shopping. I will input all of the items from my shopping list and see where I can find the best price. It sometimes takes a little extra effort because you need to determine if you are paying for shipping or not, which can make a huge difference in the overall savings. Yet this can help you save money in the long run.

After each purchase always remember to keep a record of the following items:

- Date of purchase
- Store/website you purchased from
- The items you purchased
- The total amount spent
- Date of delivery
- Date of arrival

With tips like setting a budget, planning out thoughtful gift giving and utilizing online sales, these strategies will help you avoid overspending and still enjoy the holidays. Wishing you and your family the best this holiday season!



By Matt McDonnell, CFO  
Blackhawk Bank