



Money monitor

Best Buys plus
what's in
the news

IS IT WORTH IT?

Mint gift card

Mint has come up with a new way to give money as a present without having to use a voucher or cash. Its gift card costs £3 to buy, and you can then load it with amounts from £10 to £250. The recipient can buy whatever they want anywhere the Visa Electron card is accepted. Unlike other pre-paid cards, it can't be used at

cash machines or topped up.

Anyone can receive a gift card, but to buy one you have to be at least 16 years old and have a debit

or credit card and a valid email address. When the card expires, or if you want to cancel it and receive unspent money, you have to pay from £3 to £25, depending on the type of account you want the remaining funds to be transferred to.

VERDICT A novel way of giving money as a present, and at £3 relatively good value.



Contacts

Barclaycard
0800 731 0200
www.barclaycard.co.uk
Capital One
0800 952 5358
www.capitalone.co.uk
Dunfermline BS
0800 028 2440
Egg www.egg.com
GE Money 0808 208 1150
www.gemoney.co.uk
Halifax 0800 389 1166
www.halifax.co.uk
HSBC 0800 328 1278
www.hsbc.co.uk
Intelligent Finance 0800
917 6082; www.if.com
Marks & Spencer
0845 900 0900; www.
marksandspencer.com
Nationwide BS

0800 302010
www.nationwide.co.uk
Norwich & Peterborough
0845 300 2511
www.npbs.co.uk
Post Office 0800 169 2000
www.postoffice.co.uk
Saga 0800 214836
www.saga.co.uk
Sainsbury's Bank
0800 032 1365; www.
sainsburysbank.co.uk
Stroud & Swindon
0800 618161; www.
stroudandswindon.co.uk
Ulster Bank
028 9089 8888
www.ulsterbank.co.uk
Virgin 0800 096 9939
www.virginmoney.com
Yorkshire BS 0800 028
0183; www.ybs.co.uk

CREDIT CARDS FOR BORROWING	APR (%)	TYPE OF BORROWER		
		OCCASIONAL PAYER	NEVER PAYER	HOLIDAY PAYER
HALIFAX Flat Rate Online Visa	5.9	✓	✓	✓
BARCLAYCARD Simplicity Platinum Visa	6.8	✓	✓	✓
EGG Money MasterCard	7.9 ^a	✓	✓	✓
YORKSHIRE BS Base Rate Tracker Visa	10.7	✓		✓

^a Rate depends on your credit score

BALANCE TRANSFERS: 0%	APR (%)	0% PERIOD		FEE % OF BALANCE	DEAL STARTS
		TRANSFER (MONTHS)	PURCHASE (MONTHS)		
ULSTER BANK (NI) Gold MasterCard	16.9	6	6	n/a	Transfer
STROUD & SWINDON Advantage Visa	17.9	6	6	n/a	Transfer
NORWICH & PETERBOROUGH Visa	14.9	6	-	n/a	Transfer
DUNFERMLINE BS Black/Platinum	15.9	6	-	n/a	Transfer
GE MONEY Transformation MasterCard	12.9	12	12	2.5 (min £5)	Issue
BARCLAYCARD Flexi-Rate Visa	14.9 ^a	12	-	2.5 (min £6.25)	Issue
CAPITAL ONE Platinum MasterCard	15.9	12	3	2.0	Transfer
HSBC MasterCard	15.9	12	3	2.0 (min £5)	Transfer
VIRGIN MasterCard	15.9	12	3	2.0 (min £3)	Transfer
BARCLAYCARD Platinum	17.9	12	3	2.5 (min £6.25)	Issue

^a Rate depends on amount repaid each month

BALANCE TRANSFERS: LONG TERM	APR (%)			
	BALANCE TRANSFER	STANDARD PURCHASE	RISK BASED	DEAL STARTS
MARKS & SPENCER MONEY &more MasterCard	3.90	16.90 ^a		Transfer
INTELLIGENT FINANCE Life of Balance Visa	4.95	16.90	✓	Issue
CAPITAL ONE Life of Balance Platinum MasterCard	5.94	12.90	✓	Transfer
SAINSBURY'S BANK Standard/Platinum Visa	5.94	15.90	✓	Transfer

^a Also 12 months at 0 per cent on purchases

SPENDING ABROAD	APR (%)	FEES (%)	
		EU	WORLD- WIDE
POST OFFICE Classic & Platinum MasterCard	13.9	0	0
NATIONWIDE BS Classic & Gold Visa	15.9	0	0
SAGA Visa	14.9	0	1

Information based on data supplied by www.moneyfacts.co.uk

All rates correct at 11 October 2006

If you've got ideas or views on anything financial, we'd love to hear from you. Please get in touch with us at moneynews@which.co.uk

£874 million

the amount banks charge annually
on 8.1 million packaged accounts

MINTEL

Cards for borrowing

When calculating Best Buys, we are the only organisation to take into account the way cards charge interest, as well as the interest rate, to find the true cost. We show Best Buys for three types of borrower: occasional payers pay one in every four bills in full, never payers never or rarely pay their bills in full, and holiday borrowers borrow for big purchases and pay the debt off over the year.

Credit cards for balance transfers

There are still a few cards that don't charge fees for balance transfers – these are at the top of our table. The longest fee-free deals are for six months, offering 0 per cent on both balance transfers and purchases. You will go on to a higher standard rate at the end of these deals, so remember to switch to another card or pay off the debt. Deals that start from the date you make the transfer are better than those that start from when the card was issued because they offer the full interest-free period.

If you're happy to pay a fee, GE Money has the longest deal – 12 months for both balance transfers and purchases. As with other cards in the table, the fees aren't capped, so if you transfer a large balance you could be charged a hefty amount. And watch out: the fee may be treated as a purchase and attract interest, and new purchases may be charged at a higher standard rate. Neither of these will be paid off till you clear the balance transfer.

If you don't want to switch every time a deal ends, transfer your balance to a card with a long-term low rate, as it will last until you have paid off the balance.

Spending abroad

Nationwide Classic Visa is still a good choice to take on holiday, but the Post Office has just dropped its foreign usage fee for its Classic and Platinum MasterCard. Saga Visa is free if you're in the EU but charges elsewhere.

All other cards charge 2.5 to 2.75 per cent for spending abroad and for cash withdrawals.

Your money

Pricy packages

Banks are increasingly trying to get us to pay fees for our bank accounts in return for benefits such as travel insurance. But you'll probably end up paying for benefits you won't use, already have or could get cheaper elsewhere. Here are some examples.

■ Lloyds

Premier (£300 a year) Main benefits are AA



Lloyds TSB

breakdown cover, worldwide travel insurance, mobile phone insurance, £500 interest-free overdraft, card protection and identity theft insurance, plus discounts on holidays. Although this sounds like good value, you could get the really useful benefits (travel insurance and breakdown cover) elsewhere for less.

■ Barclays

Additions

(£138 a year)

Benefits include



BARCLAYS

a pretty worthless additional one-year extended warranty on purchases, basic breakdown cover, domestic emergency cover and mobile phone insurance.

■ HSBC Passport (£5 a month,

or £50 a year) Aimed at foreign nationals, this account offers a debit card, access to ATMs worldwide and a mobile phone

Sim card with £10 of calls. But HSBC also offers a free basic account, with direct debits and access to HSBC ATMs. HSBC said: 'It can be difficult for new arrivals to open an account. Passport is more like a current account than a basic bank account.'



Equity release loophole closed

After hard lobbying from Which?, the government has agreed that all equity release schemes will be covered by the same financial regulations. From April next year, providers of home reversions must make sure the scheme is suitable for you – and you can go to the Financial Ombudsman Service if they get it wrong. Other equity release schemes have had this protection since October 2004.

Emma Bandey, personal finance campaigner for Which?, said: 'We're delighted that the government has closed this loophole. Now all consumers buying equity release products will have the same protection.' See www.fsa.gov.uk for more.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Complaints rise...

■ The Banking Code Standards Board, which oversees the banking industry's voluntary code of conduct, received 2,242 complaints in the year to March 2006, up from 1,812 in the previous year. A quarter of the complaints were about loans and overdrafts, and 17 per cent were about credit cards.

...as do interest rates

■ Amex Blue, Capital One, Egg Money and Smile are among the credit card companies that have raised interest rates by more than the base-rate increase of 0.25 per cent. If your credit card company has put up its rates, vote with your feet and switch to a better deal.

NI banks' high charges

■ After a supercomplaint made by Which?, the Competition Commission has confirmed that bank charges in Northern Ireland are high. But we are disappointed that it didn't further analyse these charges to decide if they are excessive and if so take suitable action.

TAKE ACTION!

During November you can get your will written in return for a donation to Will Aid. Visit www.willaid.org.uk for more information.

OUR UNIQUE RESEARCH

Our Best Buys

We analyse the whole market to bring you our Best Buys. With savings, loans and current accounts we recommend only companies that subscribe to the Banking Code. This protects you if anything goes wrong. Like all Which? recommendations, our Best Buys are totally independent – we're not swayed by industry influence.

MEMBER BENEFIT

FREE website access

Our members-only website contains regularly updated Best Buys for current accounts, Isas, savings accounts and mortgages, plus information on car and house insurance, financial advice and protection insurance. Go to www.which.co.uk/money