Utah State University
DigitalCommons@USU

All Archived Publications | Archived USU Extension Publications

1-1-2001

Checking Your Credit Report

Barbara R. Rowe PhD
Utah State University

Warning: The information in this series may be obsolete. It is presented here for historical purposes only. For the most up to date information please visit The Utah State University Cooperative Extension Office

Recommended Citation
Rowe, Barbara R. PhD, "Checking Your Credit Report" (2001). *All Archived Publications.* Paper 1314.
http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/extension_histall/1314

This Factsheet is brought to you for free and open access by the Archived USU Extension Publications at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Archived Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact becky.thoms@usu.edu.

UtahStateUniversity
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

FINANCIAL FITNESS

Fact Sheet

November 2001 FL/FF-12

CHECKING YOUR CREDIT REPORT

***Barbara R. Rowe*, Ph.D.**
Professor and Family Resource Management Extension Specialist
Utah State University[1]

Most of us use credit. Credit lets us use goods and services while we pay for them. Consumers can get credit because lenders can identify which borrowers are likely to pay their bills. They do so by obtaining the payment histories of individual consumers from credit reporting agencies or bureaus. Credit reporting agencies collect and report personal credit histories and debt repayment practices to their subscribers–mostly area businesses and banks. Local credit bureaus report their information to the three major credit-reporting agencies: Equifax, TransUnion, and Experian. Between them, these agencies cover all fifty states, are highly computerized, and have millions of files and millions of subscribers paying a monthly fee for this information.

What a Credit Report Contains

A credit report's purpose is to help a lender decide whether to grant credit or not. The typical credit report contains four types of information:

1. ***Identifying information:*** your name (including Sr., Jr., III), nicknames, current previous addresses, Social Security number, year of birth, current and previous employers, and, if married, your spouse's name.

2. ***Credit information:*** the credit accounts you have with banks, retailers, credit card issuers, and other lenders. For each account, your credit report will list the type of loan (revolving credit, student loan, mortgage, etc.), the date you opened the account, credit limit or loan amount, the account balance, and payment history for the past two years.

3. ***Public record information:*** bankruptcies, foreclosures, court ordered chid support or alimony, or tax liens. Bankruptcy information may stay on your report for up to 10 years.

4. ***Inquiries:*** the names of all creditors and potential employers who obtained a copy of your credit report for any reason; employer's inquiries are retained for two years, but lender inquiries for only six months.

[1]Adapted from *Check Your Credit Report,* written by Lois Smith, University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service, Urbana-Champaign, IL.

Credit reporting agencies do not make the decision to grant credit, only the lender can do that. Different lenders may make different decisions based on the same information. What is different is the importance they give to specific factors–for example, how long you have lived at the same address, what you do for a living, how old you are, how much you earn, how much you owe, and how promptly you repay.

Credit reporting agencies

Equifax Credit InformationServices
P.O. Box 740241
Atlanta, GA 30374
1-800-685-1111
http://www.equifax.com

TransUnion LLC
Consumer Disclosure Center
P.O. Box 1000
Springfield, PA 19022
1-800-888-4213
http://www.transunion.com

Experian (formerly TRW)
National Consumer Assistance Center
P.O. Box 2002
Allen, TX 75013
1-888-397-3742
http://www.experian.com

Review Your Credit Report

Order a copy of your credit report from one of the three main credit reporting agencies using a form like the one on the next page. Call for the cost–it is around $8.00.

If you have been turned down for credit within the last 60 days because of negative information, the report should be free. You can also get a free credit report if you are unemployed, getting public assistance, or a victim of identity theft.

You have the right under federal law to review your credit report upon request and to ask the credit bureau to correct any incomplete or inaccurate information at no charge.

Keep Your Credit Report in Top Form

You can keep your credit report in top form by using credit responsibly. Make payments on time and under the terms of your agreements. Always pay at least the minimum amount required. Paying more than the minimum is always a good idea, but you can keep a good credit record as long as you pay at least the minimum and pay it on time. When you move, be sure your creditors are the first to know your new address. Then your bills will arrive on time, making it easier to pay them by the deadline.

If, for any reason, you cannot pay your bills promptly, call your creditors right away to set up a repayment schedule you can both accept. Don't accept credit cards you do not need or will not use. If the total amount of credit available to you is high, you may be turned down for credit you really want, even if your balances are low. The potential for "max-ing out" your credit may be too great for the lender's comfort.

Monitor your credit. At least every other year, ask all three national credit-reporting agencies whether they have a file on you. Not all agencies will have all the same information, either. Inspect your files periodically and ask that any errors or omissions be corrected. Then re-check in 60 days to be sure that they have done so.

Credit Report Request

Date:

Please send me a copy of my credit report. Following is the information you will need:

Full name, including Sr., Jr., III (print):
Social Security number:
Birth date:

Spouse's full name, if married:
Spouse's Social Security number:
Spouse's birth date:

Current address:
Previous address(es) in the last five years:

_____
Signature

Check one
☐ Payment enclosed
☐ Because of information obtained from your credit file, I have been denied credit within the past 60 days.
☐ I am a victim of identity theft, on welfare, or unemployed.

Enclosed is a photocopy of my driver's license or current utility bill or my military ID for proof of address.

Utah State University is an affirmative action / equal opportunity institution.
Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Jack M. Payne, Vice President and Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. (EP/DF/11-01)