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Contact: Holley Bolen, 402-471-3888

### **Helpful Tips For Buying Holiday Gift Cards By Attorney General Jon Bruning**

With the holiday rush upon us, Nebraskans are looking for ways to make shopping easier and less stressful. For many Nebraskans, gift cards are the answer.

According to the National Federation of Retailers' 2007 Annual Holiday Survey, gift card purchases are on the rise. They estimate that \$26.3 billion will be spent on gift cards this holiday season. This amount is up \$1.5 billion from 2006. The survey also found that more than 87 percent of consumers plan to purchase two or more gift cards over the holidays.

There are many different types of gift cards to choose from as you shop. Some may be used only in the store where they are purchased, while "mall" cards may be used in a number of stores at a particular shopping mall. Cards displaying Visa or MasterCard logos may be used in stores across the country.

As you are shopping this season, it's important to remember that different retailers have different policies. Here are some tips and important facts that will help you with your gift card purchases:

- 1) Even though the card has a Visa or MasterCard logo, it is not a credit card because it does not carry the same protections. If your card is lost or stolen, you will need to know the number on the card and report it to the retailer to get any protection.
- 2) There are big differences between store-issued and bank-issued gift cards. Over 90% of leading retailers have no fees associated with gift cards; however, some bank-issued gift cards may have an expiration date or add on activation, maintenance, inactivity and transaction fees. Some bank-issued gift cards even charge a fee for checking the balance.
- 3) Today's gift cards differ from traditional gift certificates because they have a 'stored value'. When a consumer spends only a portion of a card's value, the balance is updated electronically. Reissuing a new card with the updated balance is not usually required.
- 4) Improved technology has made it possible for some retailers to reissue a lost gift card if the consumer has the original receipt. Retailers also encourage gift card recipients to register their card through the store's Web site, which enables them to check their balance online and receive a new card if they lose or misplace the original card.

- 5) Retailers are adding new features to gift cards, making them more personalized for the recipient. Many retailers allow consumers to design their own gift cards, adding personal messages and photos.

If you would like more information about gift cards, call the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division at (800) 727-6432 or visit us online at [www.ago.ne.gov](http://www.ago.ne.gov).

Have a safe and happy holiday season!