



Reward yourself

Whether they're shopping for cosmetics or cruises, Canadians love their rewards programs.

According to COLLOQAY's 2009 Loyalty Marketing census, the average Canadian household is active in nine programs, almost 50% higher than the average U.S. household.

Almost every major retailer today offers some type of loyalty program - from everyday purchases like groceries and gasoline to big ticket items like appliances and vacations. Since you can do so much with a loyalty program it makes sense to try and get the most from them. Using them wisely can make a bigger difference than you might expect. It is your money after all and you could stretch your household budget with a little extra attention to how and where you shop.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF LOYALTY PROGRAMS

On the surface, it's pretty easy – the more you spend, the more points or cash rewards you accumulate. But there are a few guidelines to keep in mind.

First, when it comes to points you earn with credit card companies, limit yourself to just one or two cards. If you use too many different cards, it may take too long to accumulate the points you need to earn rewards.

Secondly, choose the right card for your budget and your spending habits. Generally speaking, cards with higher fees come with better benefits. But if you don't spend enough to take advantage of any rewards, then you're just paying to have the card.

Zero in on what suits you best, and then find the card that offers it. For example, you might choose to collect points that can be exchanged for contributions to an RESP, RRSP or non-registered investment. Or you might prefer the standard travel reward programs, whose points can purchase everything from airline tickets to groceries.

Make sure you're getting the most out of your card or program by keeping on top of new promotions and programs. The best way to get more information about promotions, such as bonus points, is to contact companies directly by phone or check their websites.

CONSOLIDATING REWARDS FROM DIFFERENT PROGRAMS

Some companies will let you consolidate rewards – that is, you can combine points from one program with points from another in order to get the reward you have in mind. To find out if – and how – you can do this, contact the companies involved and ask for more information.

MORE WAYS FOR SMARTER USE OF LOYALTY PROGRAMS:

- If you shop regularly with a certain store or company, ask if they have a loyalty program. Not all businesses actively promote them.
- Consider all the items you purchase on a regular basis that aren't currently included in a loyalty program and see what you stand to gain by including them in a loyalty program. For example, if your credit card has a point system but you've never considered using your credit card to buy your family's groceries, you could be missing out on \$500 to \$1,000 a month on grocery-related points alone. That's \$6,000 to \$12,000 a year that could be going into your points collection.
- Collecting points is a great idea, but don't overlook more ordinary customer rewards programs, such as punch-cards that reward you with something free after a number of purchases – whether it's a pound of coffee or a fast-food meal, freebies can add up.

And then reward yourself: that free flight to Aruba might be just a shopping trip away.

Canada's most popular loyalty programs

Air Miles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9.5 million members • points are collected for purchases at 120 retailers and 100 online shops; • points can be redeemed for extensive list of items. Check gift catalogue on website • enroll online
Aeroplan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 million members • points are collected at more than 70 participating companies in retail, financial and travel industries • points can be redeemed for air fares, hotels, rental cars, range of merchandise; more than 800 reward choices • enroll online
Credit card companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • most financial institutions offer a selection of reward programs for credit card users • points are collected for purchases using the card • check the website for your financial institution for details on any rewards program offered

Compliments of:



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