

Consumer News & Views

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Consumer Confidence Rebounds in March.

Consumer confidence rebounded in March, as Americans regained optimism about the short-term outlook for the economy. The Conference Board's index of consumer confidence rose to 96.2 in March from an upwardly revised 94.0 in February, the group said Tuesday. Several economists attributed the upswing to improvement in financial markets following volatility at the start of the year.

Thomas Hinton, president of the American Consumer Council, a non-profit consumer education organization, stated, "We've seen positive signs in terms of consumer spending for homes, autos and household goods in the past three months. Also, consumers' attitudes towards job and wage growth is improving as the economy continues to grow. This is welcome news given the negative political climate in Washington and the uneasy situation Europe."



March's rise "suggests that the rebound in stock markets more than offset the impact of higher gasoline prices in recent weeks," Steve Murphy, U.S. economist at Capital Economics, said in a note to clients.

The Wall Street Journal reported that fewer consumers reported an expected rise in incomes in the next six months, which some economists flagged as one reason consumer spending hasn't broken out in a meaningful way.

Anna Louie Sussman of *The Wall Street Journal* reported that "The year kicked off with volatile equity markets, and consumers continue to be concerned about sagging growth in overseas economies. But the U.S. labor market has been steadily adding jobs, and wages have risen over the past year."

Millennials Lead the Pack in Retirement Savings.

Remember all the times your parents harped on you to save more for your nest egg and spend less on a night out in college, Millennials? You can tell Mom and Dad you're finally listening to them.



Photo courtesy of Time.com

Millennials have shown the greatest increase in their savings rate compared with any other generation, according to new data from Fidelity. The typical 20-something is now stashing away 7.5% of income vs. just 5.8% in 2013. Generation X and Baby Boomers are still saving larger percentages of salary but have not stepped-up their contributions by nearly as much.

Overall, Americans significantly improved their "retirement preparedness" score — a measure of how well people will be able to afford at least their essential expenses in retirement — since the benchmark was last assessed in 2013 by Fidelity. That year, Fidelity found that 38% of Americans were prepared for retirement. In 2015 that number jumped to 45% as a result of better saving and investment allocation, the analysis shows.

5 Mistakes to Avoid When Buying a Used Car. By Trent Hamm

It's that time of year when parents start looking for cheap, but reliable, transportation for their college-bound kids.

Buying a used car can be a tricky task. You're making a major purchase without some of the "safety nets" that come with a new car, which means you have to put a little bit of additional care into the purchase. Here are five tactics that can take some of the guesswork and uncertainty out of buying a used car.



1. Don't wait until you're boxed into a corner to begin shopping. With any major purchase, whether it's a used car, home or anything else, you need to be in full control of the purchase or you put yourself at the mercy of the seller. If you wait until you're in a position where you must have a car soon, you lose control of the situation. You're at the mercy of the sellers and the options available to you, and you have very little room to say "no."

Don't let that happen. Keep an eye on your current car so you know when it's nearing the end of its natural life. Start the buying process for the replacement before that car completely fails you. That way, you can afford to say "no" to sellers or to cars that aren't meeting your needs. You should never put yourself in a major buying situation where you can't say "no" and walk away.

2. Don't start shopping without knowing what you need and what you're looking for. Before you start looking, spend some time assessing your needs and doing a research into what kind of car will best match those needs.

The first step is to figure out what you're actually looking for. Do you need a small car for commuting? Do you need a larger vehicle to transport your family? Do you need a truck for carrying goods on a regular basis? Don't focus on the exceptional situations; instead, focus on what you'll be doing with the vehicle most days.

Once you know what you're looking for, stop at the library and do some research. Dig out issues of Consumer Reports, and see which models were considered the best several years ago. Also, find the most recent car issue of Consumer Reports, and look at the reviews of different brands to see how they've held up over time. This will give you several makes and models to look at, which you can then find online. When looking at online car reviews, don't get hung up on a few negative reports, as there are always people with unusual situations and the full story is rarely shared in online comments. Make sure to look for consistent positive or negative comments.

3. Don't limit your search just to car dealers in your area. You should do online searches with a wide radius from your home. Search Craigslist and other online car listings like the automobiles section on eBay. Widening your search will give you a greater chance of finding the best model for your needs and more pricing options.

4. Don't wait until the last minute to consider how you'll pay for the car. If you have the cash to purchase the car, this is a non-issue and, honestly, it's the best way to buy. However, paying cash doesn't apply to everyone. If you need to finance a car, talk to your bank before you start shopping. How much can you borrow at a healthy interest rate? Can the bank get the papers in order so the loan is finished quickly when you find the right car? You should never start shopping for a car without knowing what you can actually afford to spend on that car. You need a realistic upper limit, and your bank can help you figure that out.

5. Don't buy without having a mechanic look it over. When you're feeling good about buying a particular car, don't pay for it until you get a mechanic to look it over. Most auto shops provide this service at a very low cost or sometimes even for free. Use a shop you've visited successfully in the past or one recommended by a trusted friend.

If there are major issues with the car, a mechanic should point them out in a pre-purchase review. Most used cars will have one or two minor issues or perhaps a major issue or two that will arise in the future, so don't run away from a car just because there is one problem on the horizon. You're mostly looking to avoid a car that has a bunch of impending problems.

These steps can help you make a strong buying decision the next time you need to shop for a car. Don't forget, the earlier you get started, the better.

Trent Hamm is the founder of the personal finance website www.TheSimpleDollar.com, which provides consumers with resources and tools to make informed financial decisions. This article first appeared in U.S. News & World Report's Money.

ACC Annual Meeting Scheduled for June 10, 2016. The American Consumer Council will hold its annual membership and business meeting on Friday, June 10, 2016 at 10:00 am at The Lodge at Torrey Pines located in La Jolla, CA. The meeting is open to all members of ACC and there is no charge to attend the meeting. The business agenda for the meeting will be published in May 2016. For more information, please contact ACC's meeting department at 1-800-544-0414.



The Lodge at Torrey Pines, La Jolla, CA

ACC's Friend of the Consumer Award Recognizes Outstanding Businesses in 2015-2016.

Is your business consumer-friendly? Does your business deserve greater recognition for its service to consumers? If so, you should apply for the American Consumer Council's Friend of the Consumer Award. Now is the time to apply!

Throughout the year, ACC presents its "Friend of the Consumer" Awards. This prestigious award recognizes manufacturers, retailers, and other businesses that produce or sell products in the United States that meet or exceed federally-mandated standards and are touted by consumers as "consumer friendly."

Each year, ACC awards numerous "Friend of the Consumer" Awards to deserving companies and organizations because they have "demonstrated a commitment to American consumers by providing a specific product or service that fosters consumer confidence and market acceptance."



To apply for the "Friend of the Consumer" Award, complete the online application and return it to ACC with the application fee. Applicants will be notified within 5 days of receipt of their application. Thereafter, a panel of independent judges will review your application and make a formal recommendation within 20 days of receipt of your award application.

For more information, visit: <http://www.americanconsumercouncil.org/awards.asp>

Green CSM Certification Accepting Applications for 2016 Summer Cycle:

If your company or organization would like to increase its credibility with consumers, you should consider applying for the **Green CSM Certification**. Applications for the 2016 Summer cycle are now being accepted through September 30, 2016.

It's a proven fact that consumers want to do business with companies that are eco-friendly and practice Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The process is straight-forward and all applicants are recognized by ACC and the Green USA Institute.

All applicants complete the criteria and submit their responses to ACC's Green Consumer Council for review, assessment and feedback. Program details and the **Green CSM Certification** criteria can be viewed at ACC's website located at: <http://americanconsumercouncil.org/greenc.asp>

