

# Consumer News & Views

Published monthly

November-December, 2019



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**Consumer Confidence Remains Steady for October.** The Conference Board’s *Consumer Confidence Index*® declined slightly for October following a decline in September. The Index now stands at 125.9 (1985=100), down from 126.3 in September.

“Consumer confidence was relatively flat in October, following a decrease in September,” said Lynn Franco, Senior Director of Economic Indicators at The Conference Board. “The Present Situation Index improved, but Expectations weakened slightly as consumers expressed some concerns about business conditions and job prospects. However, confidence levels remain high and there are no indications that consumers will curtail their holiday spending.”

Consumers’ assessment of current conditions improved somewhat in October. Those claiming business conditions are “good” increased from 37.4 percent to 39.2 percent, while those saying business conditions are “bad” decreased from 12.2 percent to 11.2 percent. Consumers’ assessment of the job market was mixed. Those saying jobs are “plentiful” increased from 44.5 percent to 46.9 percent, while those claiming jobs are “hard to get” increased slightly from 11.0 percent to 11.8 percent.

Consumers were less optimistic about the short-term outlook in October. The percentage of consumers expecting business conditions will improve over the next six months decreased from 20.0 percent to 18.6 percent, while those expecting business conditions will worsen decreased from 13.3 percent to 11.6 percent.

Consumers’ outlook for the labor market was also less upbeat. The proportion expecting more jobs in the months ahead decreased from 17.6 percent to 16.9 percent, while those anticipating fewer jobs increased from 15.4 percent to 17.8 percent. Regarding their short-term income prospects, the percentage of consumers expecting an improvement increased from 19.7 percent to 21.1 percent, while the proportion expecting a decrease held steady at 6.5 percent.

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## Three Consumer Trends for 2020 Focus on Data Privacy, Conscious Capitalism and Environmental Stewardship.

A recent survey by the American Consumer Council reveals three trends that will take center stage in 2020. Among U.S. consumers, the top three issues confronting them are: (1) Data Privacy including Identity Theft; (2) Supporting Conscious Businesses, and (3) Environmental Stewardship remains a strong focus for consumers, especially those under 35 years of age.



**1. Data Privacy.** This issue continues to rank first among consumers who fear that the three major reporting bureaus — Equifax, Experian and TransUnion — and social media giants like Facebook won't be able to protect consumer information from hackers and data pirates.

Because consumers rely so heavily on credit card use and having to share their personal data with social media companies, there is a genuine concern that data hackers will gain access to personal bank accounts and other important consumer data that can wreak havoc in the lives of every American.

ACC has cautioned consumers to guard their personal data, especially their Social Security number since it represents the master key to your personal data. ACCC has also encouraged consumers to change and strengthen their passwords by using combinations of letters, numbers and special characters, different for each account. This seems to work best.

Finally, ACC encourages consumers to check their credit reports frequently. You're entitled to an [annual credit report](#) every year from each of the three major credit reporting bureaus. Consider requesting one report every four months, so you can check for suspicious or incorrect information throughout the year. In between those requests, you can monitor your [free credit report](#) from NerdWallet to monitor your credit and also watch your score for changes.

**2. Support for Conscious Businesses.** In 2013, John Mackey, co-founder and co-CEO of Whole Foods Market, and Raj Sisodia, a professor of marketing at Bentley University, Waltham, Massachusetts, collaborated to propose a new, enlightened form of capitalism. Their book embodied was entitled *Conscious Capitalism*.

During the past six years, consumers have increasingly supported the notion that a conscious business is not only good for consumers, but also, good for the planet. The theory behind the Conscious Capitalism movement suggests that business and capitalism can and should work together for the benefit of all stakeholders – customers, vendors, creditors, the public, or any other group that can affect or be affected by the actions of a business – and not exclusively for the benefit of shareholders or solely because doing good may be profitable.

The authors claim that the exclusive focus on short-term profits led to the financial meltdown and global recession in 2008-2011, as well as unethical behavior, wanton pollution of the planet, demands for a 24/7 work ethic (despite cutbacks in support), and a general distrust of business. They argue that corporations should exist for a greater purpose than simply making money for their shareholders.

Consumers, especially Millennials and Gen Z'ers, strongly support companies that look beyond short-term financial goals, and promote customer service, community support and advocate for consumer involvement instead of apathy and opposition. In a nutshell, consumers want to make America and the world a better place for all of its inhabitants.

This is why companies such as Whole Foods Market, Southwest Airlines, Costco, Google, Apple, and The Container Store are drawing broader support and stronger sales from American consumers. Larger, global companies are taking notice of this trend. Walmart, the world's largest corporation, announced plans to purchase an additional \$250 billion worth of products made in the U.S. during the next decade, hopefully helping to reinvigorate the American manufacturing base. Walgreens pioneered a company-wide effort to prove that people with disabilities can be exceptional employees, capable of the same production and entitled to the same compensation as able-bodied workers.

In the case of Walgreens, there is factual evidence that doing good is not anti-capitalistic, but can, in fact, enhance profitability. These programs – and others like them in large and small corporations across the country – are evidence that American executives are considering a new paradigm of corporate responsibility.

**3. Environmental Stewardship.** The third most popular trend for consumers in 2020 is Environmental Stewardship. Many consumers indicated they are shocked at the decline of the ice cap in the North and South Poles; the destruction of the

Amazon Rain Forest, the polluting of rivers and contamination of drinking water around the world, and the destruction of cities and forests due to out-of-control wild fires in the Pacific Northwest caused by climate change.

Environmental Stewardship and the twin issue of Sustainability have come to the forefront in the wake of increased global understanding that economics, environmental health and human well-being are interconnected and interdependent. Consumers indicated they want to do more to understand and promote sustainability, but also change the current course of environmental destruction and hold companies accountable for contributing to the decline of our planet.

### **New ACC Video Focuses on “How to Ask Your Boss for A Raise!”**

The American Consumer Council has released a new video as part of its financial education series. The latest video, which targets Millennials and Gen Z'ers, is entitled, "[How to Ask Your Boss for a Raise!](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjkREP03-GU)" Members can view it at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjkREP03-GU>



ACC also released three other videos as part of its series to help Millennials feel more confident about their financial dealings. Those videos are: "[How to Have a Great Vacation...on the Cheap!](#)", "[Money Topics Every Couple Must Discuss](#)" and "[What Consumers Should Know About Time Shares Before Signing on the Dotted Line.](#)"



ACC's financial education video series is designed to help consumers, especially Millennials, better manage their finances and get access to financial services. The free series is available online at <http://www.americanconsumercouncil.org/videos.asp> and features certified financial planner and author, Kimberly Curtis, who is a popular author, speaker and the CEO of The Wealth Legacy Institute in Denver, Colorado.

The video series has been well received by Millennials (18-30 year old) and has encouraged over 6,000 Millennials to join credit unions since September 1, 2016.

The other video topics include: [Paying for the Cost of College](#); [Paying Off Debt While Building Wealth](#); [Home-Buying Mistakes to Avoid](#); [Goals to Reach by Age 30](#); [Money Mistakes Everyone Makes](#); and, "[How to Prevent Identity Theft.](#)"

Click on any of the links to watch these videos.

The American Consumer Council's president Thomas Hinton, stated "Millennials (ages 18-30) want timely information delivered through short videos to help them better manage their money and debts. This series answers many of their questions and encourages Millennials to seek out the services of credit unions that are skilled at providing a broad range of financial services at very competitive rates."

According to ACC's research, there are over 75 million Millennials in the United States and nearly 42% have not established any financial services relationship with an insured financial institution.

The American Consumer Council is currently promoting a series of financial education videos for Millennials that will be continue into 2020. ACC expects a strong response to the video series given the number of inquiries ACC has received from its 243,000+ members.

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### **ACC's Friend of the Consumer Award Recognizes Outstanding Businesses.**

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>

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### **Green C<sup>SM</sup> Certification Accepting Applications for Winter 2019 Cycle:**

If your company or organization would like to increase its credibility with consumers, you should consider applying for the **Green C<sup>SM</sup> Certification**. Applications for the winter 2019 cycle are now being accepted through December 20, 2019.

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 C<sup>SM</sup> Certification** criteria can be viewed at ACC's website located at: <http://americanconsumercouncil.org/greenc.asp>