

newsworthy trends

Prepaid Cards: For Gifts, Travel And More

(NAPSA)—Whether you're traveling, sending your teenager off to school or looking for a special gift and unsure what to buy, the answer could be in the cards. Prepaid cards, that is.

Prepaid cards are part of an increasingly popular trend of storing money on a "plastic" card that, at a later date, can be used for purchases or cash withdrawals at ATMs. Prepaid cards are like gift certificates, travelers' checks, and money orders, where consumers pay upfront for future purchases. Yet, that's where the similarities end and opportunities begin.

Unlike cash, checks or certificates, prepaid cards are an incredibly versatile payment instrument, providing an assortment of benefits. For example, prepaid cards carrying the MasterCard logo can be used for purchases at millions of merchant locations worldwide, be replaced if lost or stolen, and allow for account balance review and management by phone and the Internet. The cards are practical for the budget-conscious gift-giver and traveler. They are suitable as pocket money for emergency needs, or even when doling out a kid's allowance. MasterCard prepaid cards also offer protection against fraud and theft, an added security benefit.

For gift-giving in particular, prepaid cards are an excellent choice. Often the gift-giver can personalize the card for special occasions such as birthdays, weddings, graduations, holidays, or as a special thanks for clients, col-

leagues or employees. Prepaid gift cards leave the purchase decision squarely in the hands of the card recipient, making giving all the easier.

When deciding which prepaid card meets your needs, here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- Review the cardholder agreement for any transaction charges, fees, expiration dates, or use limitations that may apply

- Choose a card with ATM functionality, ensuring on-demand access to cash

- Consider a "reloadable" card, which allows funds to be added when necessary, extending the card's utility and lifespan

A Card for Every Occasion

Whether you're traveling across town or across the globe, shopping at a local store or the trendiest boutique, grabbing a burger and fries or dining at a gourmet restaurant, prepaid cards are a great way to pay for all kinds of purchases.

Today, millions of consumers carry prepaid cards for an assortment of purchases or cash needs. During the 2003 holiday season alone, the National Retail Federation estimated consumers bought \$17.2 billion in gift cards. MasterCard branded versions of the cards are available at bank branches, via the Internet, by phone order as well as in thousands of retail locations nationwide, such as neighborhood convenience marts, groceries and drug stores. For additional information, visit www.mastercard.com.