NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR FINANCIAL EDUCATION

NO STORYBOOK ENDING FOR REAL-LIFE SHOPAHOLICS

GREENWOOD VILLAGE, COLORADO—This weekend, as retail-crazed women and their male counterparts in tow watch the heroine of the feature film *Confessions of a Shopaholic* spend her way through life, they may reflect on their own excessive spending habits. And, although fictitious Becky Bloomwood strives to repent her bad retail habits, when today's women prepare to purge their splurge, they'll likely look for resources online. Web-savvy shopaholics of 2009 can unite and make amends with their conscience.

It's time for a little anti-retail therapy. Shall we confess? One outlet is Spendster.org, a site launched in October 2008, by the National Endowment of Financial Education® (NEFE®). This site lets visitors confess their own shopaholic tendencies, including overspending on gym equipment, vehicles, beauty supplies and way too much Diet Coke™. Just months after launching the site, Spendster shows visitors have wasted more than $400,000 in purchases.

So what is the motivation for overspenders to air their dirty laundry online, where privacy often requires anonymity? Does a confession — albeit an anonymous one — help?

The short answer is yes.

With the sluggish economy and rising unemployment, the incidence of buyer's remorse is on the rise. For those shopaholics that just need to vent, there are the one-off, self-disclosure sites like Spendster.org or personal notes on Facebook or MySpace. For the seriously debt-ridden, the Web is full of budgeting articles and financial tools on sites such as SmartAboutMoney.org, Geezeo.com and Wesabe.com.

But what if, like the super spender Becky Bloomwood, you really, truly have a shopping problem? Here are some warning signs:

Do you:

- buy things you want without thinking about whether you can afford them at the moment?
- buy things often to cheer yourself up or reward yourself?
- struggle paying your bills because you always seem to be living on the financial edge?
- tend to keep buying more of your favorite things even if you don't have a specific need for them?
- feel intensely deprived, angry or upset if you have to put off buying something you really want?
- turn excessively to credit cards to buy wanted items?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, NEFE suggests you start gaining control of obsessive spending immediately, either through professional help, group therapy like Debtors Anonymous, or on your own. Start with 10 tips for maintaining constructive financial behaviors www.SmartAboutMoney.org/CompulsiveShopping.

Cure Your Retail Hangover

We've all been there: gotten up in the morning and thought "What have I *done*?" But the excess that's hurting you isn't from drinking too much, it's from *spending* too much.

If you find yourself suffering from a retail hangover, here are some Do's and Don'ts to help you get back on track.

DO prioritize: Often, we fall prey to retailer's persuasive displays and instead of buying only what we need, we end up with a cart full of all kinds of other stuff. Before you head out to the store, make a list and keep to it. When you get home, look at your list again and return anything you bought that wasn't on it.

DON'T remove the tags: They're itchy and scratchy and poke you in weird places, but resist the urge to rip off the tags until you're sure you are going to keep the item. Only stores with the most generous return policies will consider a return without original tags.

DO wait 30 minutes before making a purchase. Sometimes if you leave it, you might not want to go back to buy it.

DON'T make it easy: Take only the cash you need for the day. Leave your credit cards at home and freeze them if you must. Tell a friend about your situation and empower him or her to tell you "no" when you feel the urge to spend needlessly.

DO return it: If it's a recent offense, dig out your receipt (tip: keep all receipts in a designated pocket of your purse or checkbook for easy recovery) and head straight back to the store. Sometimes, in the light of a new day, that trendy winter coat doesn't look as pretty as the $400 you spent on it. Get it out of your closet immediately. If you feel that you're unable to return to the "scene of the crime" without either spending more or exchanging for a lower-priced item, ask a spouse or friend to run the errand for you.

DON'T pretend it never happened. Denial is a very powerful tool, but admitting your spending mistakes allows you the insight to not repeat them. Visit a Web site like Spendster.org for some cathartic reflection. While you're there, learn from other people that have posted their splurges.

DO look to prevent future binges. Plenty of nonprofit organizations have been established to help consumers get a better grip of their finances and budgeting. Many beneficial resources can be found on SmartAboutMoney.org, a site developed by the National Endowment for Financial Education® (NEFE®). NEFE is an independent, nonprofit foundation committed to educating Americans about personal finance and empowering them to make positive and sound decisions to reach financial goals. To learn more, visit www.nefe.org.

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