

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE MONEY YOU EARN,  
BUT THE MONEY YOU SAVE!



# CLARK HOWARD'S LIVING LARGE IN LEAN TIMES



**250+** Ways to Buy Smarter,  
Spend Smarter, and Save Money

**CLARK HOWARD**

HOST OF *THE CLARK HOWARD SHOW*  
WITH MARK MELTZER AND THEO THIMOU



**5** Tips to Improve  
Finances in One Week

from *Clark Howard's Living Large in Lean Times*  
by Clark Howard

# 1

## SEARCH FOR UNCLAIMED MONEY IN YOUR NAME.

**Do you have money in a bank or brokerage house account that hasn't been touched in a while?** Or let's say you're the unknowing beneficiary of an insurance policy that's floating around out there, or maybe a late relative you never met left you some stock in a will. After a period of time, the state eventually rules those accounts or policies dormant, and the money is sent to an unclaimed-property office. Which state office it is sent to depends on where the company holding the money is based or where the deceased person lived.

**USA Today reports that certain states suffering from budget problems have decided it's okay** to steal these leftover funds from you. Washington, Delaware, Alabama, Oregon, South Carolina, Louisiana, and Kentucky all changed their laws to make it legal to seize unclaimed money and not give it back.

**But there's good news.** There's a way to find out whether you have dormant money so you can claim it before the state does! A website called MissingMoney.com allows you to type in your name and see if you are due a refund. You can also check for relatives, but only they can claim money in their name. Do a multistate search to include the state you live in and the states that include the headquarters of all your previous employers. In addition, always search in Delaware and Connecticut, as most stock brokerage and insurance companies are based in those two states.

**Another website to check is Unclaimed.org.** And if you've ever had an FHA loan, be sure to see if there are leftover assets waiting for you at HUD.gov. (Read "See If You're Owed a HUD Refund on an FHA Mortgage" on page 132 for more details on the latter.)

**You could be a hero to a loved one, or be the beneficiary of money you didn't even know you had!**

# 2

## START ENJOYING FREE TV AND MOVIES.

**If you're like most Americans, you're probably paying \$60 per month or more for cable or satellite TV service.** It's not uncommon to pay more than \$100. That's upward of \$1,200 annually. Who couldn't use that money back in their pocket?

The high price of pay TV has forced more than 1 million Americans to disconnect their satellite or cable service, according to The Wall Street Journal. Are they going TV-less? No, they're getting TV content on the Web or with "rabbit ears" antennae instead.

That's right, you can fire your pay TV provider and use a simple pair of rabbit ears and a modestly priced digital converter box (\$ 40- \$60) to get over-the-air TV absolutely free. The picture you get over the air is actually superior to what you get when your satellite or cable provider gets done compressing its signal for distribution.

**But getting your TV signal over the air means you're going to receive only the local broadcast channels.** If you still want to get your cable fix, try going to websites such as Fancast.Com or YouTube.com for free programming. Websites like Boxee.tv and Clicker.com act as virtual program guides to let you know what's playing where in cyberspace. Most of the major networks also have free programming available at their own websites.

**Hulu.com was the real breakthrough service in this arena.** It was like a poor man's DVR, where you could watch what you wanted when you wanted on demand with commercials. Of course, they've now changed their strategy to a "freemium" model: There's only a limited amount of programming available for free, and the rest can't be accessed until you pay \$7.99 each month for their Hulu Plus pay service.

**Certain cable channels have not yet made their content available on the Internet.** But they'll ultimately have to do so or risk losing the advertising base of tech-savvy, high-income viewers. If there are specific programs you can't live without, you can always rent them from Netflix.com or a similar service.

**I've been talking for three years about people disconnecting from the cable and satellite companies.** Now that I've been with Netflix on demand for a year, I can tell you it's a real deal. My family almost never watches regular TV anymore. We simply use a Wi-Fi-enabled Blu-ray player to get the programming from Netflix to our TV. Netflix is \$7.99 each month.

**Ratcheting up the competition, Amazon has introduced unlimited streaming video** as a feature of its Amazon Prime loyalty program. The main attraction of Amazon Prime was originally the offer of free two-day shipping on most online purchases, with no minimum order size for hardcore Amazon customers who wanted to pay \$79 for annual membership. But the free streaming has been thrown in as a carrot to entice more casual customers to join. Right now there are only 5,000 programming choices on Prime, but that's expected to grow quickly. The monthly charges work out to be a little less than \$6.60. Visit Amazon.com/Prime for more details.

**I love the idea of competition creating innovation and more choice for you.** When you think about how many more competitors will be coming to market soon, you realize it's going to become routine to watch video in a whole new way for very little dough.

## GET A 2 PERCENT CASH- BACK CARD WITH NO STRINGS ATTACHED.

**When the new credit card rules went into effect February 2010**, the banks that issue the majority of cards in the United States were prohibited from practicing many of their common rip-offs. But that hasn't meant that the rip-offs have stopped completely; to the contrary, the banks have instead switched to cooking up new legitimate gouge fees, especially annual fees on cards that previously had no annual fees.

**That's put a lot of people into the market for a new credit card.** Fortunately, one respected low-cost brokerage house has stepped up to offer what I call the best credit card deal in America: Fidelity Investments.

**Their Fidelity Retirement Rewards American Express Card** takes your 2 percent cash back and deposits it directly into your IRA, 529 college savings plan, or Fidelity brokerage account. This is not 2 percent cash back only when you charge \$500 on the third Tuesday of every other month; this is every single charge— no games, no gimmicks, no annual fees, and no limits on what you can earn back. Visit [Fidelity.com](http://Fidelity.com) or call 800-343-3548 for more details.

**Notice that I didn't say a word about the interest rate of this card.** I don't even know what the interest rate is! That's because this card should really be used only by people who do not run a monthly balance.

If you do run a balance, try hunting around for a credit card at your local credit union.

**If you want another option, I also like the Pentagon Federal Credit Union Platinum Rewards card.** I was alerted to this card by a website called [CreditCardTuneUp.com](http://CreditCardTuneUp.com), which I discuss later in the book. (See "Find the Best Reward Card for You" on page 183.)

**Membership to Pen Fed Credit Union is usually limited** to the Army, Air Force, Coast Guard, Homeland Security, other U. S. military and government organizations, and related groups and institutions. But anyone can join if they first join the National Military Family Association, a nonprofit advocacy organization for military families that requires only a onetime tax-deductible fee of \$20 for entry. You don't even have to keep your membership active to remain in Pen Fed Credit Union. Visit [PenFed.org](http://PenFed.org) or call 800-247-5626 for more details.

## CHECK ALL YOUR MONTHLY STATEMENTS LINE BY LINE.

**There's something brewing right now that I consider a national scandal.** The cell phone companies are in cahoots with rip-off artists and they're stealing your money, doing courtesy billing for third-party crooks who push a variety of text messaging services.

**I know that cell phone bills are impossible to understand.** My last cell phone bill was fifty-six pages long! But I go through it page by page each month. I'll find something that's not legit about once every four months. Look for deceptive terms such as "Premium Content" or "Direct Bill Charge" (sometimes referred to as "DBC" on your bill).

**Recently, I found a \$2.95 charge for a ring tone** that the provider's website claimed was free. I called my carrier and got my money back.

**Too often, people today just get bills of all kinds charged to their credit card and never see a statement.** Don't be one of them! Get a paper statement each month and scrutinize it line by line. But if you want to go green, you can also review your full bill online each month. Just don't fall into the trap of thinking you'll get around to viewing it online and then never do it.

**Businesses are a major target because their phone bills can be pages and pages long.** But this is war. Carriers think they can get away with stealing your money, but they can do so only if you allow it.

**Sadly, the danger isn't limited to the world of telecommunications.**

Christa DiBiase, the executive producer of my radio show, is completely obsessive-compulsive when it comes to checking her brokerage account online every day. Several years ago, she logged in and noticed that every single holding she owned had been liquidated, the address on her account was changed, and there were instructions to wire the money out of the country. She reported it immediately and was able to reverse all the damage. Her vigilance foiled a crime in progress.

**Be sure to check your online brokerage or mutual fund account at least three times a week.** After the fact, there is no protection under the law if your account is fraudulently accessed. You've got to be proactive.

When it comes to your credit card statement, you should go through it carefully on a monthly basis. You're allowed a full sixty days to dispute any fraudulent charges.

## GET FREE PHONE SERVICE FOR LIFE FOR \$200.

For many years, people have been looking for a better way to make landline calls than through their monopoly phone company. Vonage was a real game-changer on this front and then other Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services like Skype came along. But you still had to put up with pesky monthly charges.



**Well, what if you could have free home phone service for life with no monthly fees? You can with Ooma.**

**The Ooma device looks like a house intercom.** You plug a cable for your Internet into it; you plug your traditional landline phone into it; and suddenly you have phone service! The makers of Ooma claim they have a built-in processor that makes their sound quality comparable to monopoly phone service. The calls do sound great.

**When I first discussed Ooma on my radio show in 2007,** many of my staffers were speculating about how long it would take for Ooma to end up in Clark's Graveyard—that repository of all those wacky, entrepreneurial ideas I love so much that never find their footing in the marketplace and go broke. (See the Clark's Graveyard chapter at the end of the book.)

**But fast-forward to today and Ooma is still around—with a new cheaper price!** When Ooma first launched, it was priced around \$400. Now that has dropped to \$200 to \$249, depending on where you get it. I've even seen it at Costco Wholesale for \$179. And that's it. No more monthly fees ever, though you will pay about \$11 annually for an FCC charge.

Of course, "lifetime service" means the lifetime of the company, not your lifetime! But at \$179 or less, that's a price point at which I am willing to take a leap of faith. [Visit Ooma.com for more info.](http://Ooma.com)

**You may also want to check out Clark Howard's new book called *Clark Howard's Living Large for the Long Haul*.**

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