

Getting a Credit Report

A September 2010 discussion on SoloSez, the email listserv for general practice, solo and small firm lawyers

There are a number of free advertisements on the web for getting a credit report. They seem flakey. I would like to get one, and I don't mind paying. Is there a proven or recommended way to get one?

Do you mean on yourself or someone else?

If you're looking for your own report, get it free at annualcreditreport.com. You're entitled to one free report per year from each of the 3 major credit bureaus. The other sites are trying to sell you a credit monitoring service that most people don't need.

If you want someone else's report, you need a valid reason under the Fair Credit Reporting Act.

Russ Goldman, New Jersey

Annualcreditreport.com is the free way to get credit reports from all three agencies. No credit scores, but very useful for consumer bankruptcy cases where the debtor doesn't know how many accounts she has.

William W. Chuang

I would like one on myself. Can you download them from annualcreditreport.com.or are they mailed?

If you go to the actual credit bureau sites (Experian, and I forget the other two), you can get your credit report for free once/year. If you want the "magic number" you may have to pay, but you can get the whole report (without the "score" number) for free. You have to tell them it's you and answer a couple of questions that presumably only you would know - they get things off your credit report and ask you, for instance, which of three banks you had a mortgage loan from, how much your car payment was, or which address you lived at (all multiple choice). You have to be diligent about rejecting any choice that requests payment, but it's not too hard. Just persevere and you will get the report. You can do it at each of the three major bureaus, once per year.

At least this was how it was about 6 months ago.

Cynthia Hannah-White, Hawaii

Correction - you can apparently no longer get it for free from Experian directly. But try annualcreditreport.com, that seems to be a site that provides the free report to which you are entitled every year.

I have also had success with the "sign up for a free trial of (whatever) and get a free credit report/score", and then immediately canceling the (whatever). But you have to do it and it's best to do the cancellation RIGHT away or you might forget.

Cynthia Hannah-White

quizzle.com

I think quizzle is by far the best resource for really free credit reports. I actually refer my clients to that site as part of our preparation for drafting a separation agreement or getting ready for equitable distribution trial/hearing.

Sarah Carr, North Carolina

If you also pay to get the "magic number," keep in mind that the only magic number that really counts is the FICO score. Every group puts together their own number to sell you, but the FICO score is far more widely used than the others. I think you can still buy it directly from FICO at myfico.com.

Stephanie Hill

The three main credit bureaus each have a different version of the score as well. I just refinanced my mortgage and part of the paperwork included a credit score disclosure form. I was surprised to see a spread of about 30 points among the 3 scores.

Anita Fuoss

You download the report from annualcreditreport.com. It's awesome. I clean up my reports three times a year (I download one every four months). I also recommend paying to check your FICO score every year or two (but I'm a Suze Orman watching personal finance nerd).

Cari B. Rincker, New York