

MONEYWISE

VALUING PEOPLE. VALUING MONEY.

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Nichole Huff, Ph.D., CFLE | Assistant Extension Professor Family Finance and Resource Management | nichole.huff@uky.edu

THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: BULKING UP A THIN CREDIT FILE

Your credit score is used when you apply for new credit, but also it could be used to check your reliability for insurance, rent, or a new job. However, some people have not yet had enough credit to generate a file. FICO, the largest company that provides software for calculating credit scores, estimates that 53 million people in the U.S. do not have enough data in their credit files to generate a FICO Score.

A credit score tells businesses how likely you are to pay back what you owe in a timely way. Your score is based on the information in your credit report, such as payment history, length of time you've had accounts open, and how often you open new accounts. Those who don't yet have a file are sometimes called "credit invisible." Others may have a file, but their past credit practices may have led to a score that is not as high as they might wish.

The good news is, there are a few tools available to those who wish to bulk up a thin credit file, either to create a score or to improve the score they already have. Two of these tools are called Experian Boost and UltraFICO.



ULTRAFICO

UltraFICO is a free service that uses additional information that you agree to share to generate this special score. Using a secure online portal, you link your banking accounts, such as checking or savings, so that your banking activity can be weighed in with your credit report data. This score does not replace your traditional score or become part of your credit report. You use an opt-in feature to share it with lenders. This score may be helpful if you have consistently kept positive balances averaging at least \$400 in your bank account.

EXPERIAN BOOST

Experian is one of the three credit reporting bureaus, and it offers its own free service



THE BEST WAY TO BUILD AND MAINTAIN A GOOD CREDIT SCORE IS TO PAY BILLS ON TIME, PAY DOWN BALANCES, AND AVOID NEW DEBT.



called Experian Boost. Boost considers monthly bills you pay that are not normally included in your credit report. You connect the bank account you use to pay your bills and select the bills you want to have counted in your Experian credit file. The system will look through two years of payment history for qualifying bills with recent on-time payments. The following types of bills and payments could qualify: phone, rent, utilities, television, insurance, internet, and video streaming services.

VANTAGESCORE

VantageScore is an additional scoring model that lenders and businesses might use. Its scoring model can generate a score as soon as one month after a credit account is opened, which is faster than FICO's 6-month or more model. Most of the time there is no way to know in advance whether a lender will use Vantage or FICO scores. However, if credit is denied, the lender will disclose the score and the factors that led to the outcome.

A NOTE OF CAUTION

Be aware that once you grant access to the additional information counting toward your score, you must be willing to accept the consequences. Just as paying on time and keeping credit charges low will help, the opposite can hurt your score. If you grant access to either your bill payment history or your bank accounts, you will need to ensure that you make those payments on time, that you maintain a balance, and don't overdraw your account in order for it to reflect positively on your score.

These programs may help pad your file, but they aren't a "cure-all." Remember, the best way to build and maintain a good credit score is to pay bills on time, pay down balances, and avoid new debt.

REFERENCES:

<https://www.fico.com/ultrafico>

<https://www.experian.com/consumer-products/score-boost.html>

<https://www.vantagescore.com/consumers/how-credit-scores-work/>

Written by: Kelly May | Edited by: Nichole Huff and Alyssa Simms | Designed by: Kelli Thompson | Images by: 123rf.com

Nichole Huff, Ph.D., CFLE | Assistant Extension Professor Family Finance and Resource Management | nichole.huff@uky.edu



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