

# Lots of financial information available via 'Net



John Deans

My father grew up during the Great Depression, and when times were rough again during the 1970s he taught me how to be frugal and become aware of the financial troubles bought about by poor fiscal policies.

This was heavy stuff for a teenager but after waiting in gas lines and learning about double digit interest rates, unemployment percentage and rampant inflation, I clearly understood what financial woes were.

Fast forward 30 years and now I'm seeing a possible return of the 1970s, or worse, not just through the newspapers but in numerous digital portals of Emails, Blogs, YouTube videos, Web articles and online financial sites.

My Pop went on to a much better place 20 years ago, but I could almost hear him say, "Get ready boy! It's about to get rough."

A couple of weeks ago we talked about how you can research online for good fuel efficient cars and now we need to cover how you can keep an eye

on this crazy economy to better help you financially protect your family. Keep in mind in that I'm just a computer consultant and not a financial consultant, but you can use these numerous online resources to gather information and make your own critical fiscal decisions.

At the time of this writing oil and gasoline prices are taking a break and finally starting to come down. Hopefully this decrease trend will continue but after reading numerous online articles about the energy demands in China and India I do not see oil dropping down to the \$50 a barrel range any time soon.

My favorite site to monitor energy prices is at [www.Oil-Prices.net](http://www.Oil-Prices.net), which has numerous small graphs that can be embedded into your own Web site. With the price of oil doubling over the past year, I have created a Web page on my site that contains several of these embedded financial graphs to give a single clear status of critical monetary entities that affect this country's economy.

Those entities are the prices of gold and oil, the value of the dollar, and our nation's every increasing debt which is fast approaching \$10 trillion. You can see this financial barometer at [www.DeansConsulting.com/Indicators.htm](http://www.DeansConsulting.com/Indicators.htm) and hopefully watch things get better.

Remember we want oil and gold to go down, our dollar value go back up and the debt to slow down its upward spiral.

Though I've been mostly out of the stock market for many years now, I watch it like a hawk keeping a close eye on some key indices that can serve as digital writings on the wall.

The stocks application on iPhone displays the daily roller-coaster of Fannie Mae and Freddy Mac are riding now. Since those two stocks have lost about 80 percent of their value, represent about half the mortgages in the USA and are about to be bailed out by the taxpayers, the stock symbols FRE and FNM are on my hot list.

If you have more intestinal fortitude than me and like to play the stock market, there are some excellent online trading services that will let you gamble like T. Boone Pickens.

I checked out though my ac-

count on ConsumerReports.org the top online stock trading websites and found the top five sites were:

Firsttrade Securities — <http://www.Firsttrade.com> (Never heard of them before)

E\*Trade Financial — <http://www.Etrade.com> (Love their commercials!)

TradeKing — <http://www.TradeKing.com> (\$4.95 trade fees)

Charles Schwab — <http://www.Schwab.com> (I've heard good things about Schwab)

Scottrade — <http://www.Scottrade.com> (Hate their commercials!)

All these sites offer real-time stock quotes, fast online stock purchases, and good research tools to help you make money quick or lose it even faster when the Federal Reserve's Ben Buranke says something bad.

Many of these stock trading sites also have a WAP (Wireless Access Protocol) version of their Web site to enable you to trade stocks directly on your phone over the Internet.

Last year I had a client trade 5,000 shares of some stock on his Treo smart phone while we were walking down the hall. He said something like, "Time to

dump this stuff," but he used a different word than "stuff."

Though I cannot stand the billionaire and nanny-state Mayor of New York Mike Bloomberg, his financial company and website are outstanding.

If you want to get a full plate of financial news and stock data then visit [Bloomberg.com](http://Bloomberg.com) and get ready to go into sponge mode.

Bloomberg even has an iPhone application available from the iTunes AppStore that delivers awesome charts, financial alerts, and worldwide economic news on a constant basis.

Other than backing up your data, the only thing I cannot stress enough is to monitor your financial transactions on your bank's Web site.

Most every bank now has online services for their customers which gives them instant access to funds over the web and enables them to watch every debit and deposit.

Just this week I saw a \$343 debit from some place called Canada's Wonderland that I know was not from me. Obviously my Chase business check card had been compromised so I immediately cancelled it, ordered a new one, and had that

amount credited back to my account within one day.

I was able to see this quickly because I have our Chase accounts setup to email us daily summaries of all transactions from all accounts.

This enabled me to jump right on it rather than finding it out weeks later from the monthly summary delivered by the mail man.

The bummer part is that I now have to update numerous websites that are set up to automatically debit my card for things like website subscriptions, online data storage, Web forms and Web-based training.

Since I make tons of online transactions with that card it was just a matter of time for it to be hijacked.

Bottom line: With more financially troubling times possibly ahead, stay informed with these online resources to protect your family's savings and finances.

Next week's column: Setting up a new computer.

*John Deans of DeansConsulting.com is a Brenham area computer networking consultant who can be reached at 289-2233 or [John@DeansConsulting.com](mailto:John@DeansConsulting.com) for questions and comments.*