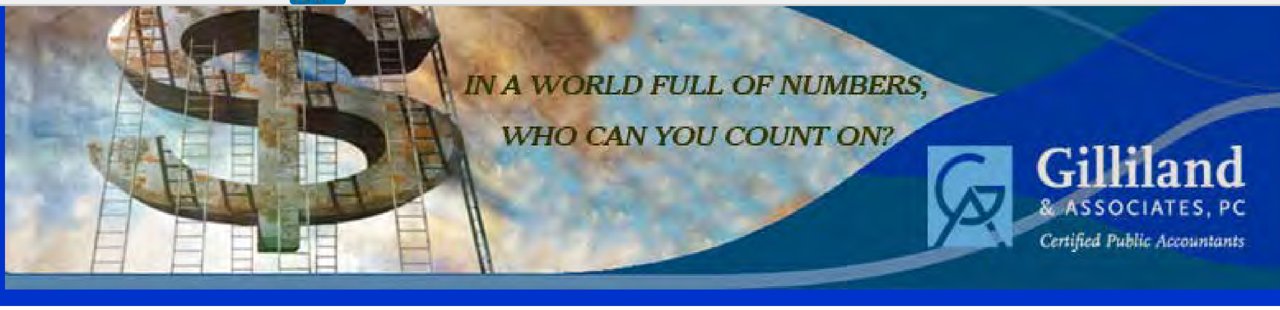

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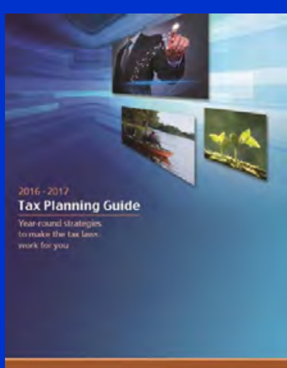

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November 2017

Year-end tax checklist

As the year draws to a close, there are several tax-saving ideas you should consider. Use this checklist to make sure you don't miss an opportunity before the year is out.

Retirement distributions and contributions. Make final contributions to your qualified retirement plan, and take any required minimum distributions from your retirement accounts. The penalty for not taking minimum distributions can be high.

Investment management. Rebalance your investment portfolio, and take any final investment gains and losses. Capital losses can be used to net against your capital gains. You can also take up to $3,000 of capital losses in excess of capital gains each year and use it to lower your ordinary income.

Last-minute charitable giving. Make a late-year charitable donation. Even better, make the donation with appreciated stock you've owned more than a year. You can often can make a larger donation – and get a larger deduction – without paying capital gains taxes.

Noncash contribution opportunity. Gather up noncash items for donation, document the items and give those in good condition to your favorite charity. Make sure you get a receipt from the charity, and take a photo of the items donated just in case.

Gifts to dependents and others. You may provide gifts to an individual tax-free of up to $14,000 per year in total. Remember that all gifts given (birthdays, holidays, etc.) count toward the total.

Organize records now. Start collecting and organizing your end-of-year tax records. Estimate your tax liability and make any required estimated tax payments.

The Equifax breach and you: be proactive

Earlier this year, hackers were able to breach the security of Equifax, one of the three national credit reporting agencies. More than 143 million Americans – nearly half the entire country – were exposed to the attack, and may have had their personal information stolen (including names and birthdates, and Social Security and driver's license numbers).

Equifax is still determining exactly whose data has been exposed. While you wait to find out, it's worth taking a few proactive steps to make sure your info isn't misused by hackers.

1. Start checking. Visit Equifax's website at www.equifaxsecurity2017.com and enter your last name and last six digits of your Social Security number. The site will tell you whether it's likely or not your data has been exposed, and put you on a list to get more information. You can also sign up for a year's worth of free credit

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monitoring.

2. Watch your statements. Start checking your credit card statements, and pay special attention to cards you don't use often. The initial reports from the breach were that hackers may have been making charges on underused cards.

3. Check your credit reports. You can look for suspicious items on your reports, such as new accounts being opened in your name, at all three credit report agencies: Equifax, Experian and TransUnion. Free annual reports are available at www.annualcreditreport.com. You may want to stagger your use of the reports to one from each agency every four months. More frequent checks will cost you a small fee.

4. Freeze your credit. If you suspect you may become a victim of identity theft, you can place a credit freeze on your profile at each of the three credit reporting agencies. This stops new accounts from being opened in your name. Note that you'll have to unfreeze your accounts if you want to apply for new loans or make your credit accessible for things such as job applications.

5. File your taxes early. One of the most common ways identity thieves use your information is to try to claim a tax refund with your data. This was the most common scam in 2016, according to the Better Business Bureau. If you file your tax return as early as possible, you shut down this opportunity for any would-be thieves.

6 must-dos when you donate to charity

Donations are a great way to give to a deserving charity, and they also give back in the form of a tax deduction. Unfortunately, charitable donations are under scrutiny by the IRS, and many donations without adequate documentation are being rejected. Here are six things you need to do to ensure your charitable donation will be tax-deductible:

1. Make sure your charity is eligible. Only donations to qualified charitable organizations registered with the IRS are tax-deductible. You can confirm an organization qualifies by calling the IRS at (877) 829-5500 or visiting the IRS website.

2. Itemize. You must itemize your deductions using Schedule A in order to take a deduction for a contribution. If you're going to itemize your return to take advantage of charitable deductions, it also makes sense to look for other itemized deductions. These include state and local taxes, real estate taxes, home mortgage interest and eligible medical expenses over a certain threshold.

3. Get receipts. Get receipts for your deductible contributions. Receipts are not filed with your tax return but must be kept with your tax records. You must get the receipt at the time of the donation or the IRS may not allow the deduction.

4. Pay attention to the calendar. Contributions are deductible in the year they are made. To be deductible in 2017, contributions must be made by Dec. 31, although there *is* an exception. Contributions made by credit card are deductible even if you don't pay off the charge until the following year, as long as the contribution is reported on your credit card statement by Dec. 31. Similarly, contribution checks written before Dec. 31 are deductible in the year written, even if the check is not cashed until the following year.

5. Take extra steps for noncash donations. You can make a contribution of clothing or items around the home you no longer use. If you decide to make one of these noncash contributions, it is up to *you* to determine the value of the contribution. However, many charities provide a donation value guide to help you determine the value of your contribution. Your donated items must be in good or better condition and you should receive a receipt from the charitable organization for your donations. If your noncash contributions are greater than $500, you must file a Form 8283 to provide additional information to the IRS about your contribution. For noncash donations greater than $5,000, you must also get an independent appraisal to certify the worth of the items.

6. Keep track of mileage. If you drive for charitable purposes, this mileage can be deductible as well. For example, miles driven to deliver meals to the elderly, to be a volunteer coach or to transport others to and from a charitable event, can be deducted at 14 cents per mile. A log of the mileage must be maintained to substantiate your charitable driving.

Remember, charitable giving can be a valuable tax deduction – but only if you take the right steps.

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