



The Two Main Credit Bureaus in South Africa: Why You Need to Check Both: By Khosi Mkhize

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When it comes to credit, most South Africans don't realise that there isn't just one credit bureau holding their information. In fact, there are two main consumer credit bureaus in South Africa — **TransUnion** and **Experian** — and they are completely different.

Think of it this way: TransUnion and Experian are like ABSA and FNB — both are financial institutions, but they have their own systems, policies, and scoring models. The same applies to the credit bureaus.

Two Different Systems = Two Different Scores

Each bureau has its own scoring model, data sources, and ways of calculating your score. That means your TransUnion score will never be the same as your Experian score — and that's perfectly normal.

They don't share the same data or formula. One might update faster than the other, or have data from a creditor the other doesn't. So, when you apply for credit, your approval might depend on which bureau the creditor uses.

Different Creditors, Different Choices

Not all banks, clothing accounts, or micro-lenders use both bureaus. Some use only TransUnion, others only Experian, and a few use both.

So, imagine being declined for a loan because the creditor checked only one bureau — yet your report at the other bureau was perfectly fine. This is why checking both bureaus is critical. It gives you the full picture of how you appear to lenders.

The Myth of “One Free Report Per Year”

Yes, the law gives you one free report per bureau per year — but that's simply not enough in today's world. Your credit information usually changes every month — from new accounts, repayments, inquiries, or defaults. Waiting a whole year to check your report is like checking your health only once a year and ignoring warning signs in between.

If you're serious about improving or protecting your credit profile, you should be checking both bureaus every month.

TransUnion Is Not Free

Many consumers believe they can view their live TransUnion report for free. That's not the case. TransUnion works on a paid subscription model, while Experian allows consumers to access their profiles for free through its *UP* platform – www.up.experian.co.za.

When you log in to Transunion, always check the date on the landing page or dashboard. If it's an old date, you could be looking at outdated data, and your score or account information may have since changed. If you're using TransUnion, expect to pay for full access. This is normal — it's part of their business model – www.transunion.co.za

Conclusion

Both bureaus play an essential role in your financial health — but they operate independently. Don't rely on just one. Make it a habit to:

- Check **both** TransUnion and Experian monthly.
- Compare your scores and reports.
- Track any changes, defaults, or updates regularly.

Remember, credit awareness is not a once-a-year activity. It's a monthly responsibility — and the more informed you are, the more control you have over your finances.

This article is part of our new weekly series on all things credit. Look out for a new piece every Monday. For more insights visit www.riquezaholdings.co.za

