

Extreme Online Bargain Shopping

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(NAPSA)—While plenty of us like to shop till we drop, that doesn't mean we want to drop a lot of money in the process. Turns out some of the best deals may be as close as your living room. There are great deals online. So keep the jammies on, eat a Christmas cookie or two, and get ready for some bonafide bargain hunting this holiday season.

Six Ways to Cyber-Save this Season:

Virtual Outlets—Many people love a good day at the outlets. Now, there are “virtual” outlets. At discount sites like Overstock.com and the new “AOL Outlets,” you can choose from a wide selection of merchandise with big brand names and deep discounts off retail prices. For example, there are more than 3,000 items from brand names like Krups, Burberry, Samsung and Waterford.

Go Deep—Sometimes the best deals aren't necessarily on the frontscreen of a Web site, just as they aren't always in the front of the store. Go deep by scrolling down or clicking on the “bargain basement” or “clearance tab” first.

Be the First to Know—For updates from your favorite retailers, sign up to receive e-mails about private sales and special offers. One word of caution: Sometimes if you don't want to receive promotional updates, you may need to UNCHECK the box with this type of offer. Otherwise your e-mail in-box could fill up quickly, especially during the holidays.



Bargain Bee Buzz—Your best source for bargain tips may very well be other bargain bees. Getting some common-sense consensus never hurts. Many sites offer customer ratings. After all, the customer is always right. AOL message boards are chock-full of tips from real-life shoppers across the country. You wouldn't believe what some people get for free! For example, one member found that buying gift certificates online resulted in big savings—some sites will sell a \$50 gift card for only \$25 if purchased online to encourage customers to do their shopping online. If you've got some bargain shopping power moves, do tell. There are thousands of people online every day clamoring for the latest shopping scoop.

Compare Prices—Savvy shoppers compare prices. Shopping BOTS (short for robot) will check prices across multiple retailers and serve up the best deals. You can use the intelligence to plan your shopping sprees. It's a great place to start. And if you're shopping online, be sure to tailor the search to include the lowest total price for an in-stock item with shipping.

Meet the Minimum—If an e-

tailer inflates shipping charges, then that so-called bargain might end up costing much more than you anticipated. The good news is there are lots of sites now offering free or flat rate shipping if you shop early. In some cases, there may be a minimum total dollar order required. For this reason, it might be worthwhile to do as much shopping as you can on a single site and meet the minimum rather than spread your purchases out over multiple sites. Smartbargains.com offers one low flat-rate shipping charge regardless of how many items you buy. Overstock.com has a flat \$2.95 shipping charge, whether you buy a designer watch or a big-screen TV. Gotta love that.

IMPORTANT BONUS TIP

Security Matters—A bargain isn't a bargain if you can't purchase it safely online. Reputable e-tailers (the big names you know and trust) and the shopping partners found on major ISPs such as AOL, meet high standards for customer service, secure transactions and privacy protection before they sell a single item. Importantly, you should NEVER give your credit card information or online password to unauthorized persons contacting you via e-mail, Instant Message, or telephone. These requests are almost always fraudulent, so don't take the bait.

You can also check a company's reputation with the Better Business Bureau or the National Fraud Information Center by seeing if any bad reports have been written about a particular company (www.bbb.com).