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TRICKY EXCLUSIONS LIMIT RETAILERS' PRICE-MATCHING POLICIES

(BOSTON, Nov. 1) -- To compete with online sellers, some brick-and-mortar retailers have finally begun matching Internet prices, but according to a new ConsumerWorld.org survey, tricky provisions in their policies may limit their usefulness and shoppers' actual savings.

In recent weeks, both Best Buy and Target have temporarily expanded their existing price-matching policies to include some online stores in an effort to attract shoppers who might otherwise make their holiday purchases over the Internet to save money.

"Price-match guarantees can theoretically save shoppers a fortune, allowing them to shop locally but also get the advantage of lower online pricing," commented Edgar Dworsky, founder of Consumer World. However, Dworsky, who even successfully negotiated a price match on a coffin years ago, warned buyers that price-matching policies today have complicated requirements and exclusions that could trip up even the savviest of shoppers.

Some of the imaginative restrictions that limit the applicability of retailers' price-matching policies include restricting price matches to only certain specific websites; limiting the items subject to price matching to just certain categories such as electronics or appliances; excluding sales advertised on Black Friday, Cyber Monday, or anytime during Thanksgiving week; excluding other deeply discounted sales such as early bird, night owl, or limited quantity sales; and not allowing price matches after the purchase is made. A *Wall Street Journal* story even quoted a Best Buy internal document that said stores will only match online prices "when it makes sense."

Price-matching policies and low-price guarantees, which have been offered for decades, generally promise to match a local competitor's lower price for an identical in-stock item merely upon the presentation of a printed advertisement showing that lower price. Most policies provide price matches both before the sale and for a short time afterwards.

Some sellers like Walmart and Target have traditionally not even matched their own .com prices in-store, but a recent company announcement has changed that at least temporarily for Target.

Consumer World reviewed the price-match policies of major retailers for *in-store purchases* as posted on their websites, and discovered that once simple money back policies have morphed into complicated plans that may actually limit shoppers' savings:

Store	Basic Price Matching Policy	Deadline for Claims	Match Own Website?	Match Internet Sellers?	Key Exclusions, Limitations, Additional Details
Best Buy	If you find a lower price on an identical in-stock product at a local retail competitor's store, a local Best Buy retail store or BestBuy.com, Best Buy will match that price.	Anytime during the return period, usually 30 days.	Yes	20 specific sites only: Amazon.com, Apple.com, Bhphotovideo.com, Buy.com, Circuitcity.com, CompUSA.com, Crutchfield.com, Dell.com, hhgregg.com, hp.com, homedepot.com, lowes.com, newegg.com, officedepot.com, officemax.com, Sears.com, Staples.com, Target.com, Tigerdirect.com, and walmart.com	Nov. 18-26 excluded for online matches; Thanksgiving thru Cyber Monday excluded in-store; Items that are limited quantity, clearance or "deal of the day" excluded; only appliances and electronics, excluding accessories, covered for online price matches. Additional exclusions apply.
Home Depot	If you find a current lower price on an identical, in-stock item from any local retailer, Home Depot will match the price and beat it by 10%.	At time of purchase. After purchase, at the discretion of the store, but extra 10% unlikely.	Yes, for your local Home Depot store's online prices, but extra 10% off not given.	No.	Matches only at time of purchase. After purchase, any match is at the discretion of the store. No matches on special orders or other Internet purchases. No blackout dates.
Lowe's	If you find a lower price on an identical item at a local retail competitor, just bring in their current ad at the time of purchase, and Lowe's will beat their price by 10%.	At time of purchase for extra 10% to apply. Within 30 days after purchase for price match without 10%.	Yes, but extra 10% not given.	Yes, but extra 10% does not apply, and the cost of shipping is added to the competitor's price.	Special order and clearance sale items excluded. Will also match competitors' online prices including shipping for sales made at Lowes.com. No blackout dates.
Sears	If you find a lower price on an identical brand and model number currently available for sale at another local competitor's retail store or at its online store (price plus shipping), Sears will match that price.	At time of purchase or up to 14 days after purchase	Yes, but not at Sears Outlet, nor for "online only" nor limited time online prices.	No, Internet-only sellers are excluded. However, online prices of local competitors will be matched if their store honors their own .com prices.	Items that are limited quantity, doorbusters, or on sale for less than six hours are excluded. Price matching does not apply Thanksgiving through Cyber Monday. Other exclusions apply.
Staples	If you find a lower price on a new identical item, just show them the lower price when you buy the item at Staples and they will match the price.	At time of purchase or up to 14 days after purchase	Yes	Only Staples.com will match online stores' prices, and only these websites: Amazon, Best Buy, Costco, Dell, Hewlett Packard, Office Depot, Office Max, Quill, Medical Arts Press, Reliable,	Staples stores will only match brick and mortar competitors and Staples.com. Will not match "special event" sales, including their own. Complicated rules

				Sam's Club, Wal-mart, WB Mason and Xerox.	apply for rebate items and shipping.
Target	If you find an identical in-stock item in a local competitor's printed ad that is priced lower than it is at your Target store, they will match the price.	Normally 7 days, but policy extended to Dec. 24 for the 2012 holiday season for purchases made Nov. 1 or after.	Normally, no, but will match Target.com for the 2012 holiday season.	Normally, no, but for in-store purchases, Target will match selected online sellers November 1 through December 16: Amazon.com, Walmart.com, BestBuy.com, ToysRUs.com and BabiesRUs.com. No price match for purchases made at Target.com.	Percent and dollar-off sales, sales requiring a coupon, limited time/quantity, and "deal of the day" sales excluded. Price matches to B&M competitors and Target.com from Nov. 1 – Dec. 24, excluding Nov 22-24. Additional restrictions apply.
Toys "R" Us	If you find a lower price on an identical in-stock item at a competitor's store or on the Toys "R" Us website, they will match the price.	At time of purchase or up to 7 days after purchase	Yes, but not "online only" items at TRU.com	No, except for baby gear at a select list of national competitors.	Percent-off, doorbuster, limited quantity, "TRU online only" and coupon items excluded. Not valid on Black Friday. No price matches on TRU.com purchases. Other restrictions apply.
Walmart	If you find a lower advertised price on an identical product at a local competitor, tell them at the register and they will match it, no ad required.	At time of purchase only. For online purchases, 7 days after purchase.	No	No. For walmart.com purchases, only price reductions found at walmart.com within 7 days of purchase will be honored, and not during Thanksgiving Week and Cyber Monday.	Percent-off and closeout sales excluded. In-store policy does not apply after purchase.
Amazon	If you find a lower price on a television on another qualifying website or being sold by Amazon itself, they will refund the difference.	14 days after shipment	Yes for TVs only.	Price matches on televisions only allowed on these sites: bestbuy.com, bhphotovideo.com, buy.com, buydig.com, cdw.com, circuitcity.com, compusa.com, costco.com, dell.com, electronics-expo.com, frys.com, hhgregg.com, newegg.com, paulstv.com, 6ave.com, samsclub.com, sears.com, target.com, tigerdirect.com, us-appliance.com, vanns.com, walmart.com	Will only match prices on TVs after purchase. Time-limited sales including doorbusters and Black Friday are excluded. Other restrictions apply.
Store	Basic Match Policy	Deadline	Own .com?	Match Internet Sellers?	Key Exclusions

Consumer World suggests that shoppers read and understand a store's price-matching policy carefully before making a purchase or a claim. Some stores, despite their stated policy, will balk at doing a price match, so be prepared to argue your case with proof in hand. For stores that don't offer a formal low-price guarantee, a savvy shopper can often negotiate a lower price merely by citing a competitor's current price. If all else fails, use a credit card that has its own "sale price guarantee" benefit offering a refund if you find a lower price within 60 days.

[Tips and chart at: consumerworld.org/pages/pricematch2012prs.htm]