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Top 10 Tips to Bag a Bargain on “Black Friday”

With the best bargain shopping day of the year nearly here (Nov. 28), shoppers are being encouraged to start their homework now on products and prices to help separate the surprisingly few real doorbusters from the many ho-hum deals being promoted this year.

“Black Friday is the real McCoy of sale days, but some stores are either keeping their best deals secret until the last minute or are just offering fewer bargains,” said Edgar Dworsky, founder of ConsumerWorld.org, a non-commercial consumer resource guide. Shoppers are being advised to check retailers’ websites for “secret deals” on Nov. 27-29.

Consumer World offers these holiday shopping tips to help bag the best bargains, (available online at <http://www.consumerworld.org/pages/shoptips.htm>):

- 1. Read the Ads:** Check local newspapers on Thanksgiving Day. They will be chock-full of circulars and last minute deals. Friday’s papers will include additional sales. To preview some of the items now that will be on sale on “Black Friday”, visit bfads.net or blackfriday.gottadeal.com, websites with advance copies of store ads.
- 2. Evaluate the Deals:** Not all advertised items are great deals particularly this year. Use several Internet shopping robots, such as the Price Checker in Consumer World, or the ones at Shopping.com, PriceGrabber.com, or PriceSpider.com (with price histories) to compare what a variety of online stores charge for the same item. If shopping online, find out the total price including shipping and tax (if any), and what the reputation of the seller is (use Shopzilla.com or ResellerRatings.com).
- 3. Research the Right Product:** A low price on a lousy product is no bargain. Check websites where professionals evaluate products, such as Consumer Reports, Steves-Digicams.com (for cameras), Ecoustics.com (TV/hi-fi equipment), PCMagazine.com (computers), best/worst toy lists, etc. Also, nothing beats reading customer reviews by real owners of the products you are thinking of buying. Check Epinions.com, and read the user comments posted after most product descriptions at Amazon.com.
- 4. Save with “Triple Plays”:** To save the most, combine the primary ways to save: buy items at a good sale price, use percent-off/dollars-off coupons offered by some stores to lower that price even more, and look for items that also have a cash back rebate.

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5. **Be an Early Bird:** Look for “doorbuster” deals at as early as 4am. (Best Buy is giving out numbers for their hottest deals starting at 3am.) Plot your route from store to store based on store opening times, and because quantities are limited, arrive before the doors open. Send family members to different stores if opening times conflict. Some of the best deals this year include: a Kenmore front loading washer and dryer pair for \$599.99 (Sears); Sharp 46” full HDTV for \$899.99 (Sears); Sony 40” full HDTV for \$899.99 (Circuit City); Samsung 40” full HDTV - \$799.99 (Best Buy); TomTom One 3rd Ed. GPS-- \$69.99 after rebate (Pep Boys); Western Digital 750 gig external hard drive - \$88.88 (Target); an 8-gb flash drive for \$12.99 a/r (Staples); \$10 off \$25 Macy’s coupon; and Black & Decker \$99 toaster oven - \$29.99 a/r (Kohl’s).
6. **Beat the Early Birds:** Consider scoping out key retailers on Wednesday before Thanksgiving to learn each store’s floor plan in advance. You can save time, gas, and avoid the crowds by ordering online since some Black Friday deals may be available on Thanksgiving Day or in the early hours of Black Friday. Some stores, like Kmart, will be open on Thanksgiving day itself with deep discount specials. A few other stores may open at midnight on Black Friday, beating Kohl’s and Penney’s (4am).
7. **Check the Return Policy:** Before buying, find out the store’s return policy. While many stores have extended their return deadlines into January, others are clamping down by imposing restocking fees on certain categories of items, or by using a blacklisting database or returns tracking system to deny refunds to returns abusers.
8. **Get a Gift Receipt:** Make returns easier for gift recipients by asking the store for a gift receipt and include it in the gift box. Without a receipt, a refund may be denied outright, or may be limited to only an equal exchange, or to a merchandise credit for the lowest price the item has sold for in the recent past.
9. **Use the Right Credit Card:** Certain credit cards offer valuable free benefits. For example, don’t be pressured into buying a service contract when you can get up to an extra year of warranty coverage free just by using most gold or platinum credit cards. Ask your credit card issuer what length warranties qualify for an extra year of coverage, if any. Some credit cards also offer a return protection guarantee (they will refund the purchase price within 90 days if the store will not), or a sale price guarantee (they will give you back the difference if an item goes on sale within 60 days of purchase).
10. **Save More with Price Guarantees:** The bargain shopping process does not end with a product purchase. Keep checking the prices of the items you bought. Since many stores offer a price protection guarantee, you may be entitled to get back some additional money if the seller or a competitor offers a lower price before Christmas. Shoppers can set up an email alert to be notified when a specific item is offered at a lower price at DealAlert.com, a price drop notification service of Consumer World.

Consumer World[®], launched in 1995, is a public service, non-commercial consumer resource guide with over 2000 links to everything "consumer" on the Internet. **Edgar Dworsky**, an avid bargain hunter, is the founder of Consumer World, editor of **MousePrint.org** – an educational site devoted to exposing the fine print loopholes in advertising, and a former Assistant Attorney General in the Consumer Protection Division of the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office.

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