

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

Holiday Shopping: Is a Sale Price Your Best Deal?

Holiday sale ads: they blanket the airwaves, jam your mailbox, and add another pound to your Sunday paper. Soon you'll be bombarded with ads for pre-holiday sales, preferred customer specials, early bird sales, midnight madness events, coupon savings days, and, don't forget, post-holiday sales. Sure you want a good deal, but just how do you decide if the deal is real? The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) offers some tips to help you get the most for your money.

- ✓ **Shop around.** A "sale" price isn't always the "best" price. Some merchants may offer the sale price on the item you want for a limited time; other merchants may discount the item you want everyday. Also, when you're comparison shopping, make sure you have: the item's manufacturer, model number, stock number or other identifying information.
- ✓ **Read sale ads carefully.** Some may say "quantities limited," "no rain checks," or "not available at all stores." Before you step out the door, call ahead to make sure the merchant has the item you want in stock. If you're shopping for a popular or hard-to-find item, ask the merchant if he'd be willing to hold the item until you can get to the store.
- ✓ **Take time and travel costs into consideration.** If an item is on sale, but it's all the way across town, how much are you really saving once you factor in your time and the costs of transportation and parking?
- ✓ **Look for price-matching policies.** Some merchants will match, or even beat, their competitors' prices. Read the merchant's pricing policy carefully. It may not apply to all items.
- ✓ **Go online.** Check out Internet sites that compare prices for items offered online. Some sites also may compare prices offered at stores in your area. If you decide to buy online, keep shipping costs and delivery time in mind.
- ✓ **Carefully consider bargain offers** that are based on purchases of additional merchandise. For example, "buy one, get one free" or "free gift with purchase." If you don't really want or need the item, it's not a deal.
- ✓ **Ask about sale adjustments.** That is, if you buy an item at regular price and it goes on sale the next week, can you get a credit or refund for the discounted amount? What documentation will you need?
- ✓ **Ask about refund and return policies for sale items.** Merchants may have different refund and return policies for sale items, especially clearance merchandise.

For More Information

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP, or use the complaint form at www.ftc.gov. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.