



Top Black Friday Shopping Tips for 2016

Follow this advice from Consumer Reports to get the best deals on Black Friday and throughout the holiday shopping season.

Some of us wait all year for the Black Friday shopping season to come around, our heads filled with the promise of scoring the best price of the year on a new TV, tablet, gaming system, or other piece of electronics. You can get some great deals on Black Friday, but you also have to avoid some pitfalls. Some shoppers get taken in by so-so prices masquerading as fantastic bargains, while others miss out because they haven't done their research.

No worries, we've been doing this a long time, and we've got you covered. Our top Black Friday shopping tips below will help you get the best deal on the items you want, and help keep frustration—and overspending—to a minimum.

1. Start Early

Ah, remember when Black Friday simply meant checking the ads in the Sunday circulars to see which local retailers had the best deals? Things sure have become more complicated. Not only has Black Friday morphed into a whole month of deals and savings, but online retailers also regularly update prices throughout the event.

So you'll need to check out the specials being offered in the weeks leading up to Black Friday. Watching these early deals will help you judge how good the actual Black Friday sales really are once it's crunch time. The same goes for Cyber Monday, which now stretches into a week of online specials.

2. Do Your Homework

Only rookies head out on Black Friday unprepared. Getting ready means studying the ads—in print and online—the weekend before Thanksgiving. In fact, Black Friday leaks are already starting to appear. (We've weighed in on [Dell's electronics deals](#), plus TV sales at [B.J.'s](#), [Kohl's](#), and [Sam's Club](#).)

You'll find tons of leaked ad scans on Black Friday-focused websites such as [bfads.net](#), [bestblackfriday.com](#), [gottadeal.com](#), and [theblackfriday.com](#). Some of these let you filter your searches by product category.

3. Compare Prices

If you spot a great deal at one retailer, check out some of the comparison sites, which include [FatWallet](#), [PriceGrabber.com](#), [PriceWatch.com](#), [Shopping.com](#), and [ShopZilla](#) to make sure you can't do better elsewhere. (Don't forget [Google Shopping](#) and [NexTag.com](#).) There are also a growing number of apps, such as ShopSavvy and BuyVia, that let you scan bar codes to compare prices, get discounts, and score coupons from local retailers. (See tip No. 6, below, for additional shopping apps.)

Even Pinterest has price-drop alerts that will monitor items you've pinned on certain websites and email you with the price differences when they go on sale. But be forewarned: Direct comparison shopping isn't always easy, or even possible. For instance, large retailers apply their deepest discounts to sets with a unique model number, which makes it hard to be sure that you're doing an apples-to-apples comparison.

4. Be Loyal

Stores often have loyalty programs that offer sales and promotions to their members first, then let them earn rewards on what they buy. Sign up for Black Friday shopping alerts about upcoming promotions, coupons, and discounts. In some cases, you can even learn whether products you want are in stock or eligible for a buy-online/pick-up-at-store option that saves you on shipping charges.

5. Get Social

The Facebook pages and Twitter feeds of your favorite retailers are a great way to find out about deals and promotions. Those retailers will often reward customers who "like" them or follow them with special alerts to Black Friday discounts and incentives. And, of course, texts, tweets, and social media posts are an easy way to share Black Friday shopping intel with your friends.

6. Phone it In

Before you head out to the store, make sure your smartphone is fully charged and loaded with a few of the comparison-shopping apps mentioned above, or ShopKick, SlickDeals, Shopula, and RetailMeNot. In addition to providing pricing info, they can often be used to place orders or monitor items via a personal watch list.

Many include a bar-code scanner to help you compare prices and a QR-code reader for coupon codes and special deals. The aforementioned Black Friday sites may also have their own shopping apps, as do the major retailers' apps, such as Amazon, eBay, and Walmart. [Amazon's Mobile app](#), for example, lets you use a smartphone camera to scan products and price shop online, while Walmart's uses geolocation—so if you've ordered online, they'll start getting your order ready the second they detect you're in the store. But as the [The New York Times reports](#), be on the lookout for fake apps that masquerade as well-known retailer apps.

7. Create a Budget – and Stick to It

Yes, this sounds simple. But Black Friday sales, especially the doorbuster specials available in limited quantities, are designed to get you into the store so that retailers can sell you something else.

Decide ahead of time how much you want to spend on your Black Friday shopping spree, and do your best to resist impulse buying, especially if you're not sure how good a specific deal is. If you find that you're too free with your charge cards, try buying with cash this year and see whether you have better self-control. But if you are sufficiently disciplined, buy with a credit card that doubles the manufacturer's warranty and then pay it off before any interest accrues.

8. Check All Store Policies in Advance

It's always good to know a store's price-match and return policies. As noted in our [3 Black Friday predictions for TVs in 2016](#), we expect more retailers to price-match specific online and in-store deals this year. Almost all of the major retailers have some form of price-match policy, and they've been expanding almost every year. But some stores might suspend their price-match guarantees during the Black Friday weekend on certain items, so read the fine print. Check the return and exchange policies for Black Friday sales to make sure that the store won't charge a restocking fee for any item you bring back.

GotHealth? Tip of the Month



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Tip: Avoid pricey accessories. You've just scored an awesome giant-screen 4K TV at an all-time low price, so don't blow your savings by splurging on pricey accessories or extended warranties. This is where retailers make their money. Hence the hard sell. If you know you'll need an HDMI cable, buy it in advance from an online retailer

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