

Module 9 - Consumerism

HANDOUT 9-3

Smart shopping tips

Have a plan

Try to avoid unplanned shopping or impulse buying. If you want to buy something, ask yourself if you really need it. Take your time to think about it before you buy. And when you shop, make a list. Planning your shopping will help you avoid purchases that you do not need.

Compare, compare, compare

When you take time to plan before you shop, you can compare products to find the best deal. Before buying, do some research. Go to different stores to see if you can get a better price. Look on the Internet for customer reviews to find out if other people were happy with the product. See if there is another product out there that is just as good, but less expensive. The more you know, the more power you have as a consumer.

Look at unit prices

In Canada, we buy gas by the litre. The cost of a litre of gas is an example of a unit price. It is the amount something costs by a certain unit of measurement. Products can be measured by all kinds of units: grams, kilograms, pounds, ounces, yards, feet, litres, millilitres, and so on. Grocery stores are required to post unit prices below many items on their shelves. To compare products and know if we are getting a good deal, it helps to figure out how much something costs per unit.

Buy on sale

Watch for sales and discounts. If something you use often is on sale, you may want to buy extra. You will be paying less in the long run. (As long as it is within your budget!) Check store flyers for coupons, discount codes, and special offers. Remember some stores price match! Get to know the sales cycles in the stores you shop at regularly. Many items go on sale at the end of a season. This might be a good time to buy the things you need.

'Sale' does not always mean 'good deal'

Sometimes the sale being advertised is not a sale at all. There may be even better deals out there that are not being advertised that way. Also, just because something is on sale, you need to consider if you need and will use the products. Keep this in mind when buying food that will go bad. Make sure that you will be able to use it all before it expires or goes to waste.

Read the fine print

Make sure that you know all about the product or service you are buying before you pay any money or sign your name to any agreement. Are there any hidden fees? Does the product come with a warranty? This is a guarantee that a product will meet certain standards, and will be replaced if it does not. To get the warranty, do you have to mail in a form? Does the store have refund or return policies?

Module 9 - Consumerism**HANDOUT 9-3, continued****Ask questions**

If there is any policy or anything in the fine print that you do not understand, ask questions. Salespeople should be there to help you. It is your money. You should not spend it unless you believe that you are getting something of value for it.

Keep your receipts

Keeping your receipts can be helpful for many reasons. You should check your receipts to make sure you were not overcharged, or charged for something that you did not get. Reviewing your receipts is also a good way to keep track of your expenses. Also, most stores require a receipt for a refund, return, or exchange.

Try alternative shopping

Thrift stores, flea markets, and yard sales can be great places to find great deals. There are also many websites where people sell their used items at a low cost. These are called 'online classifieds'. When buying used goods, be sure to inspect them carefully. Make sure that they are in good, working condition. Most private sellers do not offer refunds.

Smart Online Shopping

Some people are nervous about shopping online because of the increased risk of scams and the risk of credit card fraud. How can you protect yourself?

Security

Make sure the company is legitimate. Just because a company has a website does not mean they are legitimate. Look at the website and see if you can find out the name of the owner and the location of business. If you cannot do this, it should be a red flag. P.O. BOXES ARE NOT ADDRESSES.

Only shop on secure sites. To be certain the page you're on is secure, look for a tiny padlock icon, usually found in the top right corner of your browser's URL bar. You can also tell if the site is secure by looking for an "s" in the URL address. While non secure sites and pages begin with http://, secure sites begin with https://.

Use secure debit cards. If you are going to use a debit card to shop online, make sure that it has special security features to protect you, such as Interac Online. Your payment is completed through your financial institution, who transfers the funds to the online retailer using secure banking procedures. None of your financial details, card numbers or login information are shared with the online retailer. You are not liable for losses resulting from circumstances beyond your control, such as frauds or scams.

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Use only one credit card. Using only one credit card for online shopping limits the potential for fraud to that one account. Should a hacker come by your account information, you'll have only that credit card company to contend with.

Print out copies of transactions. When buying anything online, print out copies of all transactions and only pay via a secure site. If using an internet auction site, note the ID numbers involved and read all the security advice on the site first.

Avoid using public computers. Libraries or internet cafes are not good places to do your internet banking or on-line shopping as your personal information is more susceptible to hackers.

Avoid clicking on pop-up ads. This could lead to harmful programs being installed on your computer.

Avoid auto-complete. Be careful when using software on your computer that auto-completes online forms. This can give internet scammers easy access to your personal and credit card details.

Value

Let's say you are comfortable with the security of the site and you feel confident making a purchase online. There are still things to consider to ensure you get the best value.

Shop around. Online shopping makes bargain hunting easy. Searching the Internet is an easy way to compare prices.

Reduce shipping fees. If you are ordering multiple items from a retailer, try to order them at the same time so that you are only charged one shipping fee.

Find free shipping. Many online retailers offer free shipping on purchases over a certain dollar amount, and online coupon sites regularly offer free shipping coupon codes. If you can't find a deal on shipping, save money by opting for standard shipping vs. priority as it is cheaper.

Be careful of hidden fees. In addition to shipping costs, if you order from another country there may be extra taxes or duty charged. You must also consider the exchange rate if you are not paying in Canadian dollars. Check the final price to make sure the item is worth the cost!

Check the return policy. Before proceeding to checkout, familiarize yourself with the retailer's return policies, which should be stated somewhere on its website. You might have to pay a restocking fee of up to 25% of the price of the item and you may be responsible for paying the return shipping costs.