

# The New York Times

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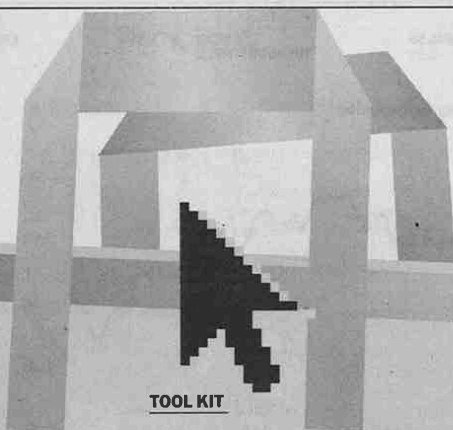
NEW YORK, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2012

## Business Day

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES BUSINESS THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2012

### PERSONAL TECH



## Click Wisely to Shop, and Enjoy the Pie

From First Business Page

for the best deal may find that what they are looking for has already sold out.”

Amazon.com, for example, started its Black Friday deals on Monday, but they end Saturday.

**SHOP ON TUESDAYS** One of the secrets of online shopping is that prices change by the second. To maximize your chances of getting the best price year-round, shop on Tuesday, a variety of e-commerce experts say. For whatever reason, Tuesday is when most e-commerce sites, including Shopbop, Etsy and RetailMeNot, post discounts and new items.

No matter the day, online retailers often start sales in the wee hours, so shop early.

As for the time of year, women's clothes, shoes and accessories are discounted most in January, February, August and September, according to Shop It To Me, an online shopping search site. For consumer electronics like laptops, shop in midsummer and late September, before and after the back-to-school rush, according to Decide.com, a price comparison site.

**NEVER PAY FULL PRICE** Online holiday shoppers should use 40 percent off as a benchmark for a good deal, said Marjorie Cader, a Shop It To Me spokeswoman, based on discount data the site has collected. Expect discounts that are about 5 percent better from online-only retailers than from those that also operate brick and mortar stores, she said.

Comparison shopping sites like TheFind or ShopStyle can locate the best prices; Google or coupon sites like RetailMeNot can also help find a discount.

Google, Amazon and even flash sale sites like Gilt.com do not always have the lowest prices. You might check small shopping blogs dedicated to your favorite brands, like Grechen's Closet for contemporary women's clothes or J. Crew Aficionado.

“Spend 20 minutes and ensure you are getting the best deal out there,” said John Faith, senior vice president of mobile at WhaleShark Media, which operates coupon sites, including RetailMeNot.

**BE A HAGGLER** This is the year haggling at the cash register could become acceptable, as offline retailers try to keep shoppers offline. If you find a better price online — by using an application like RedLaser or searching Amazon — ask whether the cashier will match it. Big retailers like Target have already said they will.

**WAIT TILL THE LAST MINUTE** Procrastinators might benefit during the holidays. Electronics sold online are least expensive in the week before Christmas, according to Decide, especially TVs, laptops and cameras.

And while Dec. 17 is the last day that most online retailers will offer free shipping in time for Christmas, Walmart, the luxury clothing seller Net-a-Porter and others will deliver the same day. In San Francisco and New York, eBay now offers same-day delivery from hundreds of stores, including Macy's, Target and Toys “R” Us.

**NEVER PAY FOR SHIPPING** . . . Nine of ten retailers will offer free shipping on certain purchases this holiday season, and a third will offer free shipping on all purchases, according to the National Retail Federation.

Some, though, require that you enter a promotional code, so it's wise to take a minute to look around the



Ebay, top, delivers to shoppers in New York and San Francisco. Some sites, like RetailMeNot, cut prices for shoppers using promotional codes.

Web site or search a coupon site to find it.

Stores including Walmart, Toys “R” Us and Nordstrom allow you to shop online and pick up your order locally.

**OR FOR RETURNS** Sites like Zappos.com and Piperlime send prepaid shipping labels, but beware.

“When it comes to returns, read the fine print,” said Brian Hoyt, a spokesman for WhaleShark Media. Some merchants include a prepaid return label but subtract the price from your refund, and others charge a restocking fee as high as 30 percent for consumer electronics.

Many companies, including Gap and J. Crew, also let you return an online purchase to a local store. And until Dec. 31, PayPal will cover the return shipping cost if the merchant does not, as long as you pay with PayPal and make the return within 30 days.

**SEARCH WISELY** Try searching synonyms, like “coat” instead of “jacket.” On sites like eBay, try leaving out words — if you are looking for an Yves Saint Laurent handbag on eBay, search for “Saint Laurent” or “Laurent bag.”

“If you search for ‘Yves Saint Laurent,’ you'll be fighting over pieces with a bigger group of people,” said Sophia Amoroso, founder and chief executive of the e-commerce retailer Nasty Gal, who suggested purposefully misspelling brand names as well. “Think of what an uninformed person might list a really great de-

#### ONLINE: PERSONAL TECH

Gadgetwise provides more advice on using personal technology and posts on the best apps, new gadgets and clever accessories for smartphones, tablets and computers.

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signer piece as, and you can get an amazing gem for an incredible price.”

eBay Fashion also lets shoppers search by taking a cellphone picture of a fabric to find similar designs.

**GET INSPIRED** Search for “black sequin dress,” and you'll get 128 results on Zappos.com, 2,618 on Amazon.com and a truly overwhelming 18 million on Google.

One solution: Trust online curators to suggest items. Etsy creates lists of recommended items. On Pinterest, you can peruse items culled by others. Other sites to search for inspiration: Polyvore, Fancy, Svsupply, Lookbook.nu and We Heart It.

**TRY IT ON, VIRTUALLY** You can visit sites that show real people wearing the clothes you're interested in buying, like Go Try It On, Fashionism and Rent the Runway and sites that show video, including Asos, MyHabit and Joy-us. Or, as long as a site offers free shipping and returns, order two sizes and return one.

**SHOP INTERNATIONALLY** “Don't let international shopping scare you off,” said Caroline Nolan, the writer of Pregnant Fashionista, a maternity shopping blog.

Many international e-commerce sites, like Asos, ship free to the United States. And because the seasons are different, winter clothes in Australia, for instance, go on sale just as Americans are starting to shop for winter, she said. FarFetch has items from small boutiques worldwide and 1stDibs is good at finding rare items like an antique from Paris. On eBay, you might have luck finding items made by a European designer by switching to eBay's site for a particular country.

**MAKE SITES WORK FOR YOU** On Shop It To Me, you can enter your favorite designers and sizes and the site will send you personalized e-mails with promotions and sales. Many sites allow shoppers to place a symbol like a heart on best-liked items or save them to a wish list. On a site like Pinterest, shoppers can build a list.

“You always think you'll remember where you saw something or what brand it was, but really you never do,” said Noria Morales, style director at Sugar Inc, a network of fashion and lifestyle blogs.

Even better, sites like Shopbop and Polyvore send alerts when items you have saved go on sale or are running low. eBay sends alerts when new items are listed for a search you have saved.

**BE DILIGENT** No one has time to read 50 e-mails a day from retailers. But for your favorite e-commerce sites, it is worth signing up for e-mails, as well as tracking them on Facebook and Twitter, where they often post exclusive deals. Many online shoppers have more luck hunting for items than trusting services to send alerts, said Grechen Reiter, owner of Grechen Media, a network of shopping blogs.

“It is the thrill of the hunt that gets us going, after all,” she said.