

Making Cents: How to get a real bargain in the Black Friday sales

Grainne McGuinness' advice on nabbing a bargain without losing the head



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It is finally, officially Black Friday at the end of this week.

Much as Christmas itself has grown to the point that early festive displays can be seen before schools have hit the autumn mid-term break, Black Friday has mushroomed from a flash sale the day after the American holiday of Thanksgiving. to a November-long onslaught of advertising.

Black Friday is a fairly recent import here, but Irish consumers and retailers have embraced it as a way to kickstart sales.

For shoppers, at its best Black Friday is an opportunity to nab some items on the Christmas list at a discounted price. Black Friday and Cyber Monday 2021 are expected to generate the largest volumes of online retail transactions in Ireland to date, according to The European Consumer Centre (ECC) Ireland.

But as with any time-limited sale, there is a danger of losing the head in the rush for a bargain. A little preparation prior to purchasing will help to limit buyer's remorse.

First up, be like Santa Claus and make a list. Anyone shopping online or in-person is going to see ads for a dizzying array of products and may find themselves tempted by what seems like a great deal on a particular item. But, unless you are the rare shopper with an unlimited budget, money spent on one bargain reduces the budget available for the rest of the shopping.

So take the time to plan out everything you need to buy between now and Christmas and then go searching for those items in the sale. Marketers are very good at what they do, but you can resist temptation by making a clear decision to buy only what is on your list.

Just as important as sticking to your list is sticking to your budget. Assess how much you have to spend on gifts and your other Christmas shopping this year and break that amount down to how much you can spend on each individual item (or person you are shopping for if you haven't decided on a specific gift). Not sticking to these amounts will only

Analysis of Google search data in the UK showed that around the end of November last year, online searches for 'loans' skyrocketed by 45%, coinciding with the typical Black Friday sales rush. Every year in Ireland we hear similar reports of households slipping into debt as a result of Christmas spending. Don't be tempted to break the bank because something is on offer, it is not a bargain if it wrecks your budget.

The other thing to be aware of when shopping in the sales is that something isn't necessarily a bargain just because the ad you are viewing suggests it is.

ECC Ireland advises consumers to make sure the 'deal' is not a situation where retailers simply inflate the prices before reducing them down again in order to give customers the impression of getting 'a huge discount'. It recommends tracking the price of a product to ascertain if the final, on-sale price represents a genuine, net reduction.

"ECC Ireland recommends that consumers compare prices and retailer offerings for the same product in order to get the best deal," a spokesperson said.

So have a look at a few different retailers selling big-ticket items on your list and get an idea of the current price, particularly retailers who haven't yet started their Black Friday sales. That way, when you check again on Friday or over the weekend, you will know if you are being offered a genuine bargain.

Finally, if you have a gift in mind but not a particular make or model, remember that price is not the only indicator of value. If an item costs slightly more but is likely to last for much longer it is the better deal.

Again, your own research is needed to identify the better product, try not to be swayed by marketing.

"It's a good idea to make sure you get a good price for a superior-value product that is more sustainable and durable, which means you ultimately get more out of the purchase," ECC Ireland says.

"Consumers should check that ratings and reviews for promoted products are genuine and stay away from superlative, unsupported claims such as "best in", "number one for", "the premier destination", "the leading manufacturer".

"To avoid being swayed by unfair terms and trading practices that prevent consumers from making an informed purchasing decision, it is advisable to always read the Terms and Conditions (i.e. the small print), double-check the cancellation policy, and dismiss "special" terms that are, in reality, basic statutory consumer rights regarding returns and refunds."