

Support local this year and turn your Black Friday green

John Hearne on how keeping money in a community is so crucial

Consumer interests

Last year, consumer magazine *Which?* tracked 83 products placed on sale during Black Friday 2018, just to see if the sales did actually provide any value.

The result? 95% of these products were available for the same price or cheaper within six months of the sale. Some 61% were the same price or cheaper six months before Black Friday.

All of which is to say that just because they tell you you're getting a bargain, that doesn't mean that you are.

ECC Ireland, which offers advice and assistance to Irish consumers shopping for goods and services within the EU, says don't assume Black Friday deals are the best deals of the year.

In a bulletin, the agency points out that these days, things go on sale throughout the year, so don't let over-the-top marketing and the feeling of urgency overwhelm your common sense.

First off, do your research. Compare prices and retailers. Look up the price before sale to make sure you really are getting an actual deal on your desired purchase. Shop around. Don't stick to one website.

Always look at the final price rather than the saving discount, which is often

vague. If you're looking for a particular deal on a particular item, bookmark the web pages ahead of time to see how the price updates when the sales launch at your chosen retailers. Make sure that price comparison claims between competitors are fair, verifiable and refer to like-for-like products/versions.

Many retailers will offer genuine, no-obligation additions to deals, things like free delivery, temporary discount codes and exclusive subscriber promotions. It's worth signing up to retailers' newsletters, loyalty programmes and/or following them on social media as this may give you early access to deals and additional discounts on top of the sale prices. That's if you can put up with the junk mail, and you're happy that that they are using your data responsibly.

ECC Ireland also advises that you watch the quality. Don't let the lure of a huge discount make you buy what is ultimately a poor-value product. Think of the discounted price as a bonus

rather than using it as your starting point for your purchase. Superior quality products will also be more sustainable and durable, and

often come with an extended warranty/guarantee which means you are ultimately getting more out of your purchase.

And don't fall for old news. Black Friday and Cyber Monday are great for high-end tech products and entertainment gadgets. But remember that sales events are a way for shops to shift old stock quickly before it becomes obsolete. That great price you're being offered might be for last year's version, with its associated limited features and compatibility issues. Double check before you hit 'buy'.

And, as always, watch for scams. Be doubly wary if you're in the market for hot ticket items like the latest gaming systems. When the PlayStation 5 came out last week, the launch was quickly followed by far too many stories of gamers and their parents who thought they had secured the console only to realise they had been scammed out of hundreds of euro. Stick with reputable sites and don't be seduced by deals that are too good to be true.

Check the domain name—that is the central section of the web address. Dodgy sites sometimes use a recognisable company name, but that name may not appear in the domain name itself. Beware

too a domain which ends in .net or .org; these are rarely used for online shopping by legitimate sites.

Make sure the site has a real world address, and not

just a web presence. The trader is legally obliged to provide a full name, address and contact details. An email address or a contact form is not good enough. If you can't find these details, there may be something fishy going on. Use your instincts, just as you would when buying in any other context.

It's a good idea to shop from sites based in the EU. That way, you'll enjoy the additional layer of protection EU legislation gives. Note too that just because a website address ends in '.ie' doesn't necessarily mean the website is based in Ireland. Check the postal address of the seller before buying.

Better still, avoid the risk of being scammed by not buying anything at all this Friday. If that's not an option, consider spending locally.

Green Friday is the brainchild of Cork-based duo Bronwyn Connolly and Meadhbh O'Leary Fitzpatrick of Wild Design Collective. For the last four years, they've been taking a stand against the consumerism of Black Friday and highlighting the value of small business in local communities. They're encouraging shoppers, businesses and the communities themselves to come together to help each other out in what has been a particularly difficult year.

Green Friday sees more than 250 retailers teaming up to create an alternative Black Friday.

Bronwyn Connolly says: "It has been quite the year for us all and while business are really up against it, we have been so comforted and enthused by the fact that

pretty much everyone is talking about buying local and showing a real appreciation of the importance of supporting the local economy. So, while in one sense it's the toughest year ever, in another, we have a feeling that this could be the most successful Green Friday to date."

One element of the initiative involves encouraging businesses to reach out to their customers in innovative ways.

"Small businesses may not be in a position to offer the sweeping discounts business giants do, but they can do something extra special for consumers, and something arguably more meaningful. They can foster a mutual sense of appreciation and community and in this, of all years, it is needed more than ever."

The Green Friday team suggest a range of things which businesses can do to help encourage local custom: Plant a native tree for each purchase this weekend, partner with a local charity and donate a percentage of sales, offer free shipping, free gift wrapping, a payment plan, an extended return policy, a package deal, free gifts, free demos and so on.

Some of the Green Friday businesses involved around the country through the weekend include: The Cool Food School, Irish Food Champions, Karen Pleass Textile Artist, Connemara Smokehouse, West Cork Coffee, The Temple Wolf, Green Dot Clonakilty, PS I LOVE YOU, Wild Design Collective, Alice Halliday, The HippyKidz, Mellow Cotton Boutique, Craft Food Traders, Mash Jewellery, Haus Concept store, My Cotton Drawer, Ardilaun Hotel, Kistuffnavan, Gallaghers on the Green and Chous Cottage.

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