

RECESSION RETAIL: “DEALS” SHOPPERS SHOULD WATCH - *AND WATCH OUT* - FOR

It's a recession and retailers have to come up with new, effective sales strategies if they want to stay in business. The million dollar question is: how do you get financially stressed consumers to consume? New marketing tactics entice shoppers with promises of sales, exclusive offers and improved values. But which offers should shoppers take advantage of and which should they let pass by?

For the most part, there's no easy formula for shoppers to abide by, but it never hurts to put a little more thought into these popularly marketed strategies.

1. **Customer Loyalty Programs.** Loyalty is a big factor in the success of many retailers, especially higher-end ones. Some customer loyalty programs like Sephora's "Beauty Insider" card offer customers a free gift every time they spend a certain amount of money. Other reward cards shower customers with exclusive deals and discounts, or even special holiday or birthday savings. While rewards are great, if you know you could find cheaper products at other stores don't hesitate ditch brand loyalty and shop around. Comparing prices is easy on the web.
2. **"Buy more, save more" deals.** Victoria's Secret has been using this one for years; offering shoppers 1 pair of underwear for \$10, or 3 pairs for \$25. Here it is important to do the math. The bundle is enticing because you pay less for each item, a couple dollars less in this example. However, if you really only need one of something, then why pay \$15 extra for 3? Some of these offers certainly are a good investment, but with others you just end up spending more money for items you didn't need in the first place. Now if you can find a couple friends to go in on the deal with you then that's another story.
3. **Free shipping offers** are increasing as online companies try to compete with brick and mortar businesses. Pretty much every retailer has free shipping coupons out there, often at free coupon websites like PromotionalCodes.com and CouponWinner.com. Some retailers like Amazon.com often offer free shipping on orders over a certain amount of money. Take advantage of these when possible, but make sure you don't end up spending extra money just to get free shipping.
4. **Coupons and money saving promotional codes** are great advertisements for merchants and an easy way for shoppers to save money. These deals are easy to find at free coupon sites like PromotionalCodes.com and CouponWinner.com. Many online shoppers never pay full price thanks to promotional codes. Retail websites also send out e-mailed newsletters to publicize current and upcoming deals. Try not to sign up for too many of these though as they can really jam your inbox.

5. "One day only", or "While supplies last" deals. Sometimes these really are great deals, but shoppers should be sure to check on return policies and compare prices before making an impulse purchase. These types of deals are especially popular with airlines and online discount travel companies.

If you see what you think is a once in a lifetime deal, and you have the money, then take it. For the most part though, it's best to avoid spur of the moment spending. Curb unnecessary impulse buys by imposing a waiting period before buying. When shopping online, bookmark the item you like and look at it a couple times a day, if you still want it by the end of the week, then purchase.

All retailers are trying to boost sales by marketing their products as unique, new, environmentally friendly, cheap, necessary or a just an all-around, great value. The best way to avoid being pressured into making purchases you'll regret is to carefully weigh cost versus benefit each time you make a purchase. Don't be enticed by flashing 50% off signs if you really don't want a flat screen TV anyway; but don't shy away from taking advantage of great deals on items you really do want.

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Media contact:

Andrea Woroch
Public Relations and Communications Specialist
SurfMyAds.com
Direct: 805.883.1000 ext.111
Email: Andrea.Woroch@SurfMyAds.com

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