

Sites that can save you thousands

Stop clicking all over the Web! These 7 online shopping spots will help you find the real deals fast.

The Web is supposed to make shopping simple. Click, click, click and before you know it, that sweater, bag, or box of T-bones is at your doorstep. When it works, it's like magic. But when it doesn't, you can end up surfing endlessly. Lots of sites claim to make shopping easier. There are more than two dozen price-comparison search engines alone. Some are worth your time and some aren't. So we scoured the Web to come up with a short list of sites that you can count on for great deals every time you shop. Bookmark them before you buy another thing!

USER REVIEWS

Buzzillions.com

Why we like it This up-and-comer has user reviews on everything from cars and electronics to lower-ticket items like cosmetics, clothing, and shoes to help you to find the best products and avoid the worst. Unlike rival Epinions.com, Buzzillions.com offers a broad and ever-changing list of keywords to click on, based on user reviews, for searching. You can locate reviews by using a list of attributes, like "all-weather" for a camera, for example, making it easier to find comments that are relevant to you. You can also

search for reviews from users who are like you, such as "casual user" or "working parent." And to make sure all those glowing reviews are legit, you can do a search for "verified buyer reviews." (ConsumerReports.org, run by Consumers Union, the nonprofit publisher of ShopSmart, offers user reviews powered by the company behind Buzzillions.com.) Wize.com is another site that can help narrow your search for a product based on reviews. For travel, Tripadvisor.com is the place to go. **TIP** Sort by lowest ratings first to get the scoop on products to avoid.

ILLUSTRATIONS: BEE



Another way to weed out poor products: Google the name of the product and "complaints."

MONEY BACK

Ebates.com

Why we like it With this site, the savings keep piling up even after you've checked out. You can sign in and shop at 900 participating merchants (including biggies like Best Buy, Victoria's Secret, and Office Depot). After you check out, Ebates.com credits your account with a rebate, which can be as high as 26 percent, though most are in the

1 to 4 percent range. Still, if you're buying a big-ticket item, that's a nice chunk of change. The site also lets you donate your rebate to a charity. Just beware: After we signed up we were immediately inundated with e-mail from the company. **TIP** Click on the "daily double" tab. For that day, rebates from a selected retailer are doubled. One day, we saw 8 percent cash back from Macy's rather than the usual 4 percent.

SHIPPING DEALS

Freeshipping.org

Why we like it Unexpectedly high

shipping charges are the No. 1 reason online shoppers don't make a purchase, according to a new survey by PayPal. This site helps you avoid nasty surprises at checkout. Click on a product category such as "coffee and tea" or "women's apparel" and scroll down the list to see minimum purchases for free shipping at more than 800 major retailer sites. Under appliances, for example, we quickly zoomed in on a Home Depot special offering 10 percent off any appliance over \$399. You can also search by store or about-to-expire offers. **TIP** Check out the site's blog, which



alerts you to changes in stores' policies and new free-shipping offers.

FREEBIES **Heyitsfree.net**

Why we like it We've previously recommended the freebie forum at Slickdeals.net, but since then we've found another gem. Heyitsfree is a blog that was started by 25-year-old Ryan Eubanks when he was in college and broke. He scours the Web daily to find offers that are truly worth the bother and posts them on his nicely designed site. Recent deals included a free 14-day supply of Nature Made vitamins, free caulk for windows, and a free downloadable e-book by financial guru Suze Orman. The giveaways aren't limited to stuff you have to send away for; Eubanks also lists in-store promotions such as Free Slurpee Day at 7-Eleven.

TIP In addition to scanning the daily blog, click on the product categories that interest you. You'll pull up older offers, many of which might still be valid. Also check out the links to other freebie sites.

BARGAIN PRICES **Pricegrabber.com**

Why we like it This site makes it easy to compare the prices of whatever products you're shopping for. And unlike many other price-comparison sites, Pricegrabber.com lets you calculate the total cost of an item, including shipping and tax (which, as we all know, can turn what looks like a great deal into a dud). Enter your ZIP code, and Pricegrabber.com will calculate a bottom-line price. Seller ratings, which can be sorted by highest to lowest or by most recent, are also helpful. (Pricegrabber.com provides ConsumerReports.org's price-comparison service.) Another price-comparison site worth checking is Google.com/products, the reincarnation of Froogle.com that's

still in pilot-test mode. Although it doesn't calculate shipping, this site is good for digging up hard-to-find items, including discontinued china patterns and out-of-print books.

TIP Click on the name of the product you want, then click on "reviews and ratings" and then "merchant ratings." Use the "sort by" toolbar to get retailers with the highest ratings first.

COUPON CODES **Retailmenot.com**

Why we like it Lots of sites aggregate hundreds of coupon codes that you can plug in at retailer Web sites to get discounts. To find them, simply Google a retailer's name and "coupon" or "promotion," and you'll turn up dozens. But many of the codes are expired or invalid. Retailmenot.com helps you find codes that actually work, based on input from shoppers who have used them.

TIP Click on the comments section for a code and you'll see users' tips for getting even more money off. One example we found: Combine a free-shipping code with a "percentage off total order" code.

SALE ALERTS **Shopittome.com**

Why we like it Who has time to click around the Web looking for sales? This site does the grunt work for you. Sign up, click on your favorite brands (Ann Taylor, Prada, The North Face), and then click on the kind of stuff you're looking for (shoes or skirts). The site will send you an e-mail alert daily, twice a week, or weekly with sale alerts, including coupon codes. One recent e-mail tipped us off to Nanette Lepore ankle boots marked down nearly 80 percent and steep price cuts on Ann Taylor and Ralph Lauren clothes. **TIP** Sign up for e-mail delivery on Fridays. That's when most online retailers mark down clothing, according to this site's data.

Save at walk-in stores too

Try these cool Web tools to nab bargains at supermarkets, department stores, and all your favorite places to shop

Just because you're shopping at walk-in stores doesn't mean you can't use the power of the Web to find great deals. We surfed the sites of the 100 largest retailers and then some to find the best new tools for scoring bargains.

Start by trying one or two of these tools to get you going. Also, be sure to limit your e-mail alerts, cell-phone text-message alerts, and RSS feeds to just your top five stores so you won't be overwhelmed.

ONLINE CIRCULARS **WHAT THEY'RE GOOD FOR**

Helping you spot supermarket deals so you can plan weekly shopping.

You can check prices on items at different supermarkets by visiting their sites (Safeway.com or Stopandshop.com, for example). At some sites you can sort from lowest to highest price to quickly find the cheapest products. Also check weekly specials. Look for links to "coupons," "weekly specials," "sales," and "weekly circulars."

TIP Mygrocerydeals.com scans circulars in 50 states each week and lets you search for sales at stores near you. **Shortcuts.com** lets you load up your supermarket loyalty card with electronic coupons.

E-MAIL SALE ALERTS **WHAT THEY'RE GOOD FOR**

Giving you a heads-up about sales at your favorite stores. You might also get exclusive discounts, sign-up coupons, and promotional codes for online savings.

To get started, you sign up at a store's Web site and check your e-mail. Many retailers, including Ann Taylor, Bed Bath & Beyond, Big Lots, Filene's Basement, Target, and Williams-Sonoma, will send you alerts.

TIP Too many alerts can clutter your e-mail, so sign up sparingly and set up a separate e-mail address to get these offers. Also, remember to add the stores to your "safe senders list" or check your spam box regularly.

RSS FEEDS **WHAT THEY'RE GOOD FOR**

Getting news about sales from retailers. Wal-Mart, for example, has feeds for each department that alert you to price rollbacks and other special deals. Best Buy, RadioShack, Rite Aid, and Sears also offer them.

To get started, you need an RSS reader. The latest versions of Internet Explorer and Firefox have one built in; so do personal Web pages like My Yahoo and My AOL. Once your reader is set up, subscribe to feeds by going to retailer sites and following the RSS instructions.

TIP The **iStorez.com** RSS feed can help you track weekly specials at hundreds of retail stores.

BROWSER ADD-ONS **WHAT THEY'RE GOOD FOR**

Finding lower prices online.

Download these tools and when you shop online at sites like Amazon, Circuit City, and Target, they pop up with lower prices at competing stores. At

Priceadvance.com you can download the plug-in for the Internet Explorer browser or the add-on for the Firefox browser. When we found a \$1,440 Sharp 46-inch LCD HDTV at Sears.com, the Priceadvance.com window showed lower prices at Buy.com (\$1,420) and Amazon.com (\$1,380).

TIP Click on each lower-priced retailer to make sure the price isn't even lower at its own Web site.

PHONE PRICE CHECKS **WHAT THEY'RE GOOD FOR**

Shopping online with a Web-enabled phone so you can find out about sales while you're on the go.

You can sign up for the service at Amazon.com or Overstock.com. You can also sign up for text-message alerts at the sites run by Sears and Urban Outfitters.

TIP Frucall.com lets you check prices at retailers on the spot so you can see whether that TV is as good a deal as the salesperson says. And you don't need a Web-enabled phone. Also, ask your cell-phone carrier about subscribing to ShopSmart Mobile, which gives you Consumer Reports Ratings on products.

WEB-SITE SPECIALS **WHAT THEY'RE GOOD FOR**

Finding out about weekly specials at stores near you or exclusively online.

You can get them at the Web sites of your favorite retailers.

TIP iStorez makes searching for discounts super easy. Simply click on "Store" on the toolbar and that leads to a directory linked to hundreds of stores' special deals. Or click through to shop online at the store. Macy's site recently offered 20 percent off on kitchen, bed, and bath items available online with a promotional code or at the mall with an in-store savings pass. Even Brookstone's site marks down some of its usually pricey wares on its "sale & clearance" page.