

YOUR MONEY MATTERS

Bringing you insight to make the most of your personal finances.

SMART HOLIDAY SHOPPING

Holiday shopping is supposed to be fun, an opportunity to rekindle a spirit of giving, and show friends and family how much you care about them. But it can also be emotionally and financially draining. Here are a few simple steps to keep your stress level low and your holiday spirit high this season:

1. **Follow Santa's example and make a list.** Once you've thought of everyone, assign a maximum dollar amount for each person. This will give you a sense of how much shopping you'll need to get done and help you stay within your budget.
2. **Review your credit cards for deals.** Find out which of your cards is offering the best cash-back or mileage offers and use it for all your holiday purchases. Check your statements for accrued cash-back points – many credit-card issuers allow you to convert points into gift cards for selected retailers, which can be used toward items on your list. For loved ones who are harder to shop for, the gift card itself might be the perfect present.
3. **Price check.** Use your phone or laptop to see which retailers are offering the best prices on the items you're looking for. Pay particular attention to shipping costs – the amount you need to spend to get free or discounted shipping varies widely among online retailers, so make sure you're not saving \$5 on price just to pay an extra \$10 on shipping.
4. **Spend close to home.** Buying items made locally or from small businesses nearby is a great way to support the local economy and deepen your sense of community during the holidays and beyond. It helps your neighbors, which can help you too!
5. **Make it yourself.** Working with an extremely tight budget this year? A creative and thoughtful hand-made gift is a great way to display your DIY skills and really show someone how much you care about them.



INSIDER TIP *Never Fail Gift Ideas*

Got someone on your list who already has everything or is otherwise tough to shop for? Here are a few useful gifts that just about anyone will appreciate:

- **Food.** Sounds simple enough, but a nice gift basket of cheeses, jams, crackers and spreads (or other delicacies your recipient especially likes) is always a good idea...and it's sure to be enjoyed!
- **A bottle of wine.** Tried and true, for sure, but with so many winemakers and varieties out there, you can probably find something even the most avid wine connoisseur hasn't tried yet.
- **A massage or spa-treatment gift certificate.** Not sure what they like to eat or drink? Give the gift of relaxation. If the recipient is a stressed-out boss or co-worker, the pleasure might be yours, too!

DID YOU KNOW? *Black Friday is Faltering In-store*

While Black Friday had a good run as "The Busiest Shopping Day of the Year," it's becoming less and less likely to hold that title. For smaller, non-chain stores, Black Friday was never the major phenomenon portrayed in the media. And now, with many chain stores staying open on Thanksgiving, and more and more consumers making purchases on Cyber Monday, Black Friday numbers are dropping. In 2015, spending was down more than 10%; in 2016 it declined another 5%. In 2017, sales from in-person visits held steady, but online purchases increased nearly 17%.

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