



The Season of Deals, The Season of Fine Print

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MADISON – In recent years, many major retailers have started spreading their one-day Black Friday and Cyber Monday sales into a week-long shopping extravaganza. Between Thanksgiving and the end of the year, retailers will drop additional sales and limited-time discounts on their own schedules. And did we mention in-app discounts for mobile device users?

Each of these promotions will have its own terms and conditions, including limited item inventories, rebate requirements and specific promotion dates and times. How does a consumer keep track of all of the details for these sales?

Regardless of whether you prefer to find your holiday deals online or in print ads, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) asks shoppers to pay close attention to the sales details in this season’s promotions.

“Holiday advertising sets high expectations for consumers seeking great deals, but there are terms and conditions for each sale that need to be considered before you start to shop,” said Michelle Reinen, Director of the Bureau of Consumer Protection. “Shoppers need to review the fine print in ads in order to set expectations and avoid disappointment.”

Holiday sales often introduce variances to retailers’ business hours, available item quantities, and return policies. Some discounts are only offered in store while others may require the use of a retailer’s website or mobile apps.

Other simple tips to remember when you are shopping for deals this holiday season include:

- If you use a retailer’s app, familiarize yourself with its operation in advance of your trip to the store so that you can access discounts and promotional offers before you hit the register.
- In-store promotions may require you to spend a certain amount on particular products and accept a text message from the business in order to receive a coupon or promo code. Read the fine print on posted signs for the offer.
- If you use print ads, keep them available and take note of any special prices while you shop online or in store.
- Print out promotional offers from retailers’ websites if you intend to buy a particular item in store. Include as much product information with the offer as you can, including sale prices and SKU or model numbers.
- Some one-day deals may require tickets that you receive at the front door of the store. These tickets will be limited.
- A store’s price match policies may not apply to sale items listed in holiday ads.
- Make sure you understand return/refund/exchange policies before you buy. Retailers may have alternative policies in place for holiday sales, and online purchases may not necessarily be eligible for in-store returns. Keep your receipts and pick up gift receipts for gift recipients.
- Be aware that clearance and “open items” may have different return policies or not be returnable at all.

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Wisconsin law requires stores to charge their lowest advertised price for a product and to refund any overcharge, so it is important for consumers to keep an eye on the prices at the register or in the online shopping cart. Special pricing may only apply to specific products, so be sure that you have the correct item and model name or number before you start to checkout. Speak up if you believe that an item did not register at its advertised price.

If you are charged the wrong price on an item and the business will not correct the error, file a complaint with DATCP's Weights and Measures Bureau, visit datcp.wi.gov, send an e-mail to datcpweightsandmeasures@wi.gov or call 608-224-4942.

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