



The best beauty deals

Our shoppers find great places to buy cosmetics

You're willing to scrimp on some things to save money, but not your makeup. So how can you save without giving up your favorite brands? Our team of 23 secret shoppers fanned out across the country to discover which major chain stores had the best prices on 31 popular cosmetics.

The winners were **Wal-Mart** and **Target**. Wal-Mart was a tad cheaper, but both chains had much better prices than **Rite Aid**, **CVS**, or **Walgreens**. For example, a Revlon mascara that cost \$7.32 at Wal-Mart was \$9.99 at CVS.

But to save on gas you might prefer to do your shopping online. Another benefit of buying on the Web is that

you can find department-store and niche cosmetics that Wal-Mart and Target don't carry.

So we also checked out more than two dozen beauty sites to find the best ones, which are listed here. We screened out sites with bad Better Business Bureau records, no contact information, poor return policies, or high shipping fees and ones where items were bundled (Amazon's best cosmetic deals were in multipacks).

We also checked prices on beauty sites. Buymebeauty.com had the best deals—it was even cheaper than Wal-Mart—but its selection was limited. Drugstore.com also had some good deals. The most expensive site we checked was Walgreens.com.

Beauty.com

This sister site of Drugstore.com carries loads of high-end and trendy beauty products like Stila and Urban Decay.

It features more than 200 brands. And you can combine purchases with orders from Drugstore.com to save on shipping. Beauty.com also carries a wide selection of natural makeup, is easy to use, and offers a 5 percent credit toward a future purchase. Another bonus: You'll receive three free samples with every purchase.

Shipping Free if you spend \$49 or more.

Return policy 30 days on unopened products or, for certain items, if you don't like the color. Returns cost \$4.99 unless a product is damaged or incorrect or the color is wrong.

Beautyhabit.com

This site was the best of those we checked for European brands. A color key for "New Brand" and "Products Added" helps you

home in on new items. You can also purchase a sample pack of six products for \$15 before ordering full-size items.

Shipping Free on orders of \$100 or more; otherwise \$5.95.

Return policy 14 days on most items. No returns on opened or used products.

Beautyofasite.com

It's loaded with trendy brands and a cool "as seen in the press" section searchable by month. The site's "steal the look" section tells you how you can copy your favorite celebrity's look. You get one free sample with every purchase. Our writer forgot to request the gift online at the time of purchase, but a quick call to customer service netted a baggie loaded with six free samples!

Shipping Free on orders over \$75; otherwise \$5.95 to \$8.95.

Return policy 30 days. You pay for

return shipping unless the product was damaged. All returns are for exchange or store credit only. There are no refunds or returns on color cosmetics.

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Buymebeauty.com

Although its selection is somewhat limited, this site has rock-bottom prices and a clearance section that make it worth a visit. When we did our price check of 31 popular cosmetic products, Buymebeauty.com had just nine of the items, but the prices were even cheaper than Wal-Mart's. Two brands that are well represented on the site are Revlon and Lancôme.

Shipping Free on orders of \$35 or more; \$4.95 on orders of less than \$35.

Return policy 30 days. Products must be unused and unopened, unless they are defective. You have to call or e-mail before returning products; you will also have to pay the costs of return shipping.

Cosmeticmall.com

With brands from the everyday to the obscure, this site has something for everyone, including makeup, skin care, bath-and-body products, and more. Prices range from less than \$20 to more than \$500. The site is simple and easy to navigate. It takes just seconds to choose a brand from the list and search for the product you want. And you can't beat the return policy.

Shipping \$5.95 plus 93 cents per pound.

Return policy 30 days. You can return most products for any reason, even after they're opened.

Drugstore.com

This site has tons of products and most of the popular drugstore brands, including Almay, CoverGirl, Maybelline, and L'Oréal. It might be your best source for everyday cosmetic brands if you want to shop from home. Shopper reviews can help you choose products or brands, and you can search from a large selection of sale items. One bummer is that if you don't search by brand and product, you could end up doing a lot of scrolling to find what you're looking for. But every purchase earns a 5 percent credit on future buys, and you'll get e-mail about how much credit you have.

Shipping Free on your first nonprescription order of \$25 or more; free on orders of \$49 or more after that.

Return policy 30 days. Returns are free if a product is damaged, defective, or incorrect. Returns are free on certain products if you don't like the color. Otherwise, products must be unopened and unused.

Sephora.com

Visiting the online version of this cosmetics chain is as good as walking into the store. You'll find a huge selection of products and a rewards program: Each \$100 you spend entitles you to a deluxe free sample. You'll also get three freebies with every order and a free satchel or gift box in case you're buying for a friend. Lots of info on trends will put you in the know about hot products and "cult favorites." And you'll even get a gift if you order within two weeks of your birthday.

Shipping Free on orders over \$50; otherwise \$5.95.

Return policy 60 days. Free return shipping. Store credit after 60 days.

Skinbotanica.com

If you're looking for cosmetics with only natural and organic ingredients, this site's for you. It's separated into sections for skin, body, and hair as well as cosmetics. It also carries products for babies, men, and pregnant women. And it has a great return policy.

Shipping Free on orders over \$49; otherwise \$5.95.

Return policy 60 days.

Skin-One.com

This site's focus is skin care. You'll be able to find thousands of products from around the world, and you can even e-mail questions to an aesthetician. Best of all, products are shipped free within 24 hours of a weekday order, and you won't pay any tax outside Illinois, where the company is located.

Shipping Free.

Return policy 30 days. Product must be at least 75 percent full. You have to pay return shipping fees, and no returns are allowed of an opened product if you received a sample of it with your order.

Walgreens.com

This site is both easy to use and loaded with products. It allows searches by brand, and the presentation is clean and easy to read. Unlike a few of the other sites of national walk-in stores, including Wal-Mart, here cosmetics were easy to find when we searched. But it was the most expensive site in our price check.

Shipping Many items qualify for free shipping of purchases of \$50 or more; otherwise \$5.49 for 10 pounds or less.

Return policy 30 days.

Sad site **Beautydepot.com**. This site didn't have a wide selection of products. You have to buy \$99 worth of stuff to get free shipping; otherwise you could end up paying \$7.95 or more for UPS ground. Cosmetics (and many other products) were not returnable, and there's no toll-free customer-service number.

BEST OVERALL SELECTION

BEST PRICES

GREAT DRUGSTORE MAKEUP SELECTION

GREAT FOR ORGANIC PRODUCTS

GREAT FOR HARD-TO-FIND PRODUCTS

GREAT RETURN POLICY

GREAT FOR FREEBIES

BEST SHIPPING DEAL

GREAT FOR TRENDY BRANDS

BEST ONLINE VERSION OF A WALK-IN STORE