

shop talk;))

NEWS, ADVICE AND SMART IDEAS



Cash in on liquidation sales

Five ways to avoid rip-offs and find real deals at stores that are going out of business

With so many stores having going-out-of-business sales—Circuit City, Linens 'n Things, and Fortunoff, to name a few—it might seem like a great time to shop for that TV, sofa, or designer watch you've been lusting after. But big advertised discounts don't always pan out, especially during the first couple of weeks of the sale, when markdowns are modest. And if you wait too long, there's a good chance there will be little left worth buying.

When we visited a Circuit City store during the first days of its liquidation sale, we found many prices that were higher than at competing stores. And many of the discounts didn't even come close to the sale prices advertised in that week's store circular, which was not being honored. For instance, a \$2,000 plasma TV, priced at \$1,800 at the store, was listed at \$1,500 in the circular. But even that wasn't a steal: We found it online for \$1,365, with free shipping. A \$300 printer, \$270 at

the sale, was \$150 in the circular, but another retailer had it for \$135. None of that stopped the shoppers, apparently caught up in the excitement, who clutched their merchandise in lines that snaked around the checkout counter.

SMART SHOPPING TIPS

■ **Comparison shop at local stores.** Sometimes they will drop prices to compete with going-out-of-business sales, according to the Better Business Bureau. If a liquidation price seems

unbeatable, ask a rival retailer whether it can match it or come close. It might be worth paying a bit extra to do business with a store that you think will be around for a while.

■ **Don't expect sales advice or service.** Sometimes liquidators bring in their own, less-knowledgeable salespeople. So do your research before you go and be wary when asking for technical advice. Also be prepared to transport your own TV.

■ **Verify the warranty.** Ask to see the document. Whether it's issued by the manufacturer or by a third party, it should still apply after the store goes out of business. But you might call the manufacturer to confirm, especially if the brand is not one that the retailer normally carries. Liquidators sometimes sell items from other failed retailers, and manufacturers might not honor the warranties, especially if the seller is not an authorized dealer.

■ **Inspect the item.** Make sure it's not damaged and that it has all its parts, accessories, manuals, and warranty documents. If possible, plug it in at the store to verify that it works. Purchases usually are final, so you won't be able to return or exchange it.

■ **Pay by credit card.** If the product was misrepresented or incomplete, or there's a problem with its quality, you can dispute the purchase through your card issuer.

3 WAYS TO SHOP SMARTER

Save big with this month's tips

DON'T OVERSPEND ON A MATTRESS. If your mattress is eight years old or older, it's probably time to get a new one, especially if you aren't sleeping as well as you used to. In a survey of 5,900 ConsumerReports.org subscribers who had bought a mattress within the last five years, nearly 75 percent said they slept better on the new mattress. Price didn't matter. Most were happy whether they chose top-of-the-line or bought a budget-friendly model. The secret to satisfying slumber shopping: Spend at least 10 minutes lying on each mattress before making your choice.

BUNDLE TELECOM SERVICES. You've seen the ads to combine your phone, Internet, and TV services into one bill. Our advice: Go for it. Intense competition from new fiber-optic providers like Verizon FiOS and AT&T U-Verse have driven down bundled telecom prices by as much as 20 percent. Introductory deals start as low as \$80 a month, and you might be able to extend the price after the initial period ends by negotiating. A new survey by the

Consumer Reports National Research Center found that customers of the better bundle providers were very satisfied with those three often-bundled services. To get the best deal, check the provider's Web site for the lowest rates, then call customer service and ask for the best deal. If you don't like what you hear, call around—and consider calling back later. We found that rates could change depending on which rep we talked to. Ask about "quad-play" deals that bundle in your cell phone as well.

TUNE IN TO DAILY SPECIALS. Check Consumerist.com in the morning to see its Morning Deals, a roundup of the day's noteworthy sales and discounts gathered from the Internet. Recent temptations included a refurbished iPhone from AT&T Wireless for \$99, a 30 percent-off coupon at Old Navy, and a pair of sporty Teva slip-on shoes for just \$16; we saw them selling for \$63 on another site. (Full disclosure: Consumerist.com is now a division of Consumers Union, the publisher of this magazine.)

NOW you know The most popular flavors



CANDY BARS
Snickers
(Runner-up: Reese's Peanut Butter Cups)



M&M's
Peanut
(Runner-up: Milk Chocolate)



JOLLY RANCHER
Watermelon
(Runner-up: Green Apple)



DORITOS
TORTILLA CHIPS
Nacho Cheese
(Runner-up: Cool Ranch)



NABISCO
CRACKERS
Ritz
(Runner-up: Wheat Thins)

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