

Shopping sites that save you thousands

Millions now use discount vouchers and online stores, but which is best?
By Ali Hussain

CONSUMERS are saving as much as £1,200 a year by using discount vouchers, group buying and clearance sites as the economic downturn bites, according to figures released by Halifax last week.

Clearance sites, which collect and sell unsold stock from retailers, have been one of the surprise winners of the pain on the high street, with homesandbargains.co.uk reporting a 30% increase in the number of items available through its site in the past 12 months. The discount available on recommended retail prices has risen sharply from about 30% to almost 80%.

The silver lining comes as household spending is falling at its fastest since the credit crunch started, according to the latest report on household finances by Marks, the analyst. Almost 40% of households said their finances deteriorated in the past month; just 6% said their situation had improved.

The British Retail Consortium, the industry representative, painted a gloomy picture of the high street, saying that one in 10 shops is now vacant. Clearance sites are being flooded with stock still unsold when the shelves are cleared.

Online shoppers can make further savings using a host of tools that offer discounts and cashback deals.

Research by Halifax home insurance found the average adult saves £1,200 over a 12-month period, with 90% of households now using money-off vouchers, special deals and freebies.



Gordon Douglas, 41, a senior sales manager for Samsung, from Telford, Shropshire, and his wife Caroline, 38, a resources manager for BAE Systems, shop online and use discount vouchers and cashback sites. "We have saved several hundred pounds over the past year," said Gordon, pictured with children Shannon, 11, and Niamh, 6

Another good site for electronic and white goods is Comet (clearance-comet.co.uk), although it operates as an auction. Last week, a Bosch Classixx dishwasher, normally £399.99, went for £172, a saving of 57%. A Miele W 1290 Warming Dryer sold for £620 rather than the normal retail price of £1,240, saving almost 50%.

BEST SITE homesandbargains.co.uk

CASHBACK

Cashback websites pay out when you click through to a retailer's site from them. The retailer pays the site a referral fee, some of which is passed on to the customer with the rest kept by the site. The money is paid directly to a nominated account.

Topcashback.co.uk has no annual fee, unlike some of its rivals. For example, quidco.com costs £5 a year.

Last week, Quidco was offering £100 cashback to customers who signed up to the Sky HD television service, which costs £28.75 a month. There was also the equivalent of 5% off toys and games from Boots, and 5% cashback on some Marks & Spencer furniture. On Topcashback, you could get back 3% back from Argos and 9% from lastminute.com, the travel website.

BEST SITE topcashback.co.uk

VOUCHER CODES

Sites such as vouchercloud.co.uk and vouchercloud.com have taken off in recent

years as retailers try to lure shoppers with additional discounts.

They make money in a similar way to cashback sites as they earn referral fees from retailers. However, instead of paying cash to members, they issue discount codes that can be used to get money off online shopping.

Last week, there was £30 off a Sainsbury's shop costing more than £50 if you entered the code YPYM-3F9-L4L6 on the supermarket's online checkout page. B&Q was offering 15% off kitchens and bathrooms online with the code AUG09.

The sites also offer printable vouchers that can be used on the high street to get discounts. And smartphone owners can benefit from "electronic" vouchers, which are shown to retailers at the till. A recent phone discount from Vouchercloud cut the price of a meal at Pizza Express by 25%.

BEST SITE vouchercloud.co.uk

GROUP BUYING

Group buying sites provide savings by bringing together a number of people who want to buy the same product or service. If enough agree to buy it, the provider gives them a significant discount, in some cases up to 60%.

Most of the deals offer money off on days out or beauty treatments. It is possible to search for deals in your local area as well as nationally. Last week, a one-hour massage treatment at Eastern Garden in Notting Hill, west London, was £27 rather than the typical £78 with groupson.co.uk.

RGBdeals.co.uk is another popular site. Last week it was offering a two-night stay at a four-star spa in Cornwall for £149 rather than the typical price of £400.

Incahoot.com also harnesses people power to negotiate deals. Current offers include £75 cashback if you buy the 16GB iPhone 4 from 3, the mobile operator. The 3 deal is already one of the best for heavy users, and the cashback makes it even better value. You pay £19 for the phone but get 1,000 minutes, 5,000 texts and "all-you-can-eat" data for £43 a month.

BEST SITE incahoot.com

AUCTION SITES

The difficulty with auction websites such as eBay is that there are often many people bidding for the same goods.

Fewer people know about a website where a growing number of police forces are auctioning off stolen goods that have not been claimed. Being relatively unknown means better bargains.

In some cases, a bicycle can be bought for as little as £1. The site is a rich source of electronic goods, too. For example, last week a Canon digital camera, which normally retails at £150, was sold for £36.50, while an HP Scanjet scanner, usually £200, was bought for just £1.

The items can be collected from the police station holding them or buyers can pay for delivery. The site is at bumblebee-auctions.co.uk/XcAuctionsPro.asp

BEST SITE bumblebeeauctions.co.uk

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