

Six tips for the online Black Friday and Cyber Monday sales

As South African consumers increase their use of online shopping and become part of the frenzied international Black Friday today and Cyber Monday (30 November) online sales, taking advantage of the amazing deals and getting them back home to SA in a cost-effective and reliable way will make the difference between scoring a great deal or having your bargain dreams dashed.



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Gary Hamilton, co-founder of Postbox Courier, said: "In the mayhem that accompanies these huge online sales, it is important for consumers to keep a clear head and do their homework before they head online and click the checkout button. Some pre-planning and research into potential hidden costs and logistical arrangements will save them thousands in the long run."

Tip 1: Check out the retailer

Many online retailers, such as Amazon.com, are well-known brand names, but it is important to establish the identity and integrity of the lesser-known online companies that are not instantly recognisable. Check that they have a good online reputation and that their service is rated highly. Also check that the website is trustworthy. If offers are too good to be true be wary - they might be selling pirated or illegal items. Reputation checks can be done online by checking comments and rating from previous shoppers on the site itself or on consumer review sites.

Tip 2: Check that you're on a safe and secure site

Before entering your credit card details online, make sure that you're on a secure site - look out for the small padlock symbol in the address bar (or elsewhere in your browser window) and a web address beginning with 'https://' - the s stands for 'secure'. Also, avoid making online purchases when you're in a public place as using a wireless internet service (also known as 'Wi-Fi') in public doesn't guarantee that the network is secure - even if you have been given a password to use. Look for the padlock sign.

Tip 3: Get online early and keep an eye on social media

Start checking out the deals as soon as possible - many offers will be running in the week leading up to Black Friday and Cyber Monday and there will be hourly deals on the days themselves. Also, keep an eye on your favourite retailers' social media pages for specific follower/subscriber specials and sign up for email alerts to get updates as soon as they appear.

Tip 4: Find out about billing, guarantees and delivery before you pay

Always keep an eye out for any additional costs and payment details, such as packaging and delivery costs, costs of returning items and guarantee or warranty information, before paying for your purchases.

Tip 5: Consolidate your purchases before shipping

When buying several items, either from the same retailer or various retailers, avoid paying individual shipping costs per purchase. Also, steer clear of international shipping costs by having your purchases posted to your very own 'local' postbox overseas. "Consolidating your purchases into one shipment can save you tons of money. The best advice is to send all your purchases to a local personalised postbox in the UK, the US or Hong Kong (a service offered by Postbox Courier) to save you being charged international shipping costs by the retailers; and then pay just one shipping fee to send all your purchases directly to your home or holiday address in SA," explained Hamilton.

Tip 6: Remember import fees and customs duties

Many an online shopper has been caught unawares by custom duties and fees charged when their purchases arrive in South Africa. Firstly, 14% import VAT will be charged on the value of all purchases coming into the country. Secondly, find out how much you will be charged for the customs clearance fee, which varies according to the courier company used.

"The good news is that electronics are duty free, so only import VAT and customs clearance fees apply; but up to 45% customs duty can apply on other items, such as clothing. I would recommend that you contact your courier company directly and check with them on duty fees that may apply before you buy. You want to get the balance between a great deal and cost-effective and reliable shipping and delivery right to have a good online shopping experience," said Hamilton.

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