

4 Shopping Apps That Will Save You Money This Season

Want to save some cash while holiday shopping? The best tool can be a smartphone packed with the right apps.

Some apps give you coupons you can hand to the cashier to scan, while others let you flip through advertising deals and promotions. Others let you scan barcodes at the store and check if there are cheaper options online.

I found four apps to recommend after testing more than a dozen over the past month. All four are easy to use and nicely designed.

Before you hit the mall, though, you might want to turn off notifications for these apps. Some of them will send you an alert every time a deal pops up, which can get annoying.

Retale (available for Apple and Android devices)

Promotional circulars found in newspapers can now be delivered to your phone or tablet. Open the Retale app to get fliers for stores near you. I found circulars for Macy's, Target, Toys R Us, Best Buy and other national retailers.

If a circular has coupons, Retale slaps a small green icon with scissors on it. This way, you don't have to sift through each page to find them. When you open a circular with coupons, you simply tap it once to "clip" all the coupons. That places them into a separate folder to use when you get to the store. At Macy's, I used a 20 percent discount coupon that was scanned from the app at the register. You can also print out coupons if you prefer.

I tried four different apps that digitize circulars, but Retale was the easiest to use and had the best design.

RetailMeNot (available for Apple and Android devices)

I tested several coupon apps, but I end up coming back to RetailMeNot. It's easy to use, and its map function can find deals at stores near you.

Tap the heart icon to select your favorite shops. You'll be able to see deals at those stores quickly when you open the app. I used a 20 percent off coupon at Best Buy, saving me about \$10 off a \$50 Magic Bullet blender set.

You get both in-store coupons and codes for stores' websites. While I was at Gap and Steve Madden, for instance, there wasn't a coupon available for in-store use. But I saw a 30 percent coupon for Gap.com and a 20 percent coupon for SteveMadden.com, so I left and bought the items online.

Amazon and RedLaser (available for Apple, Android and Windows devices)

Price matching is spreading to more stores, and you'll need these two apps to do it. Wal-Mart Stores Inc. is the latest company to promise to match cheaper prices you find online. Other retailers, including Best Buy Co. Inc., Target Inc. and Toys R Us Inc., have been price matching for a few years.

Use the Amazon App to scan barcodes of items in the retail store and see how much the online retailer charges. If you find a better price, show the app to a cashier. To find prices elsewhere, use RedLaser. The app, which is owned by eBay Inc., shows prices for other online stores when you scan a barcode.

Policies vary, and retailers typically accept matches only from specific rivals. For example, all of them exclude third-party merchants that use Amazon. The item shown on the Amazon App must be sold and shipped by Amazon.com Inc. I was rejected at Best Buy for one item sold by a third party. With RedLaser, the store will honor only some prices found. Target, for instance, accepts online matches from its own website, Amazon, Wal-Mart, Best Buy and Toys R Us. So if you find a lower price at Sears or Kmart, you still have to pay the regular price.

Even with those restrictions, I have still gotten cashiers at Best Buy and Target to knock as much as \$15 off an item.

--Associated Press