



# Click here for Christmas gifts



No queues, no crowds and unlimited opening hours – shopping online for Christmas presents certainly has its advantages. But how do you know which retailers are reliable and which presents to buy online to make the biggest savings?

If the thought of fighting for Christmas presents on the high street fills you with dread, you're not alone. Last Christmas, half the adult population clicked online for some or all of their shopping and spent £5 billion on the web, compared with £3.33 billion the previous Christmas.

For many of us, internet shopping is all about saving time and effort, but our research reveals you can save money, too. We saved more than £1,000 by buying eight *Which?* Best Buys online rather than on the high street and found lots of other great deals, though for some goods the internet savings were small. In this report we reveal which Best Buy gifts are cheaper on the internet – and *Which?* readers name the websites they would recommend to their

**Shopping  
online saved  
us £162 on  
a Panasonic  
plasma TV**

friends: see 'Websites you can rely on', p18.

We chose 42 Best Buy products from recent *Which?* tests that would make great Christmas presents. Our researchers then set to work in July and August tracking down the best prices for each product online and on the high street. They then calculated the average savings made by buying them online, allowing for any delivery costs. We show examples of the best bargains in each product category – see opposite.

## **Save 22 per cent on MP3 players**

Overall, we found the best savings on MP3 players – they're 22 per cent cheaper online than on the high street, on average. Other good internet buys include DVD recorders, photo printers and digital

cameras (we saved £184 buying the Best Buy Sony Cyber-shot DSC-R1 camera online).

However, you're not always guaranteed a bargain when you shop online. We saved just 4 per cent on average on TVs. And the Best Buy Pioneer DVR-230S-S DVD recorder was actually £29 cheaper in store at Richer Sounds than anywhere on the net.

We also found considerable variation in the level of savings we could make from one model to another – this was particularly true with personal video recorders and camcorders – so it pays to shop around. The quickest way to compare prices for specific models on the internet is to use a price comparison website – see 'Contacts', p18, for details of the main comparison sites.

## **'I USE THE WEB FOR EVERYTHING I WANT'**

### **Anne-Marie Miller**

55, retired

Since taking early retirement due to ill health three years ago, Anne-Marie now does all her shopping online. Groceries, household appliances, clothes, holidays, cars, photo prints, a fitted kitchen – you name it, she has probably bought it over the internet. Anne-Marie even sourced Eddie, her pedigree dog, online.

Anne-Marie has chronic fatigue syndrome, which makes shopping on the high street very difficult, but she's now a thoroughly enthusiastic convert to internet shopping. She reckons she's made more than 1,000 transactions online in the last two or three years.

'I feel totally confident in using the web for everything I want,' she told us, and she plans to do all of her Christmas shopping online.

Anne-Marie offers the following tips to readers who still have doubts about internet security: 'I'm extremely careful about online security, use dozens of different passwords and always make sure my software security is bang up to date,' she says. Anne-Marie loves the fact that online shops are open all hours – her favourite time to shop online is at 3am 'when my internet connection zips along at almost 6Mbps'.



## BEST BUYS



Average online saving  
**22%**

### MP3 PLAYERS

The vast majority of Best Buy MP3 players cost less online than on the high street. Cheaper models tend to be around £20 less but savings increase significantly on pricier models. Our best saving was £147 on the Archos AV 700 40GB. It cost £429 in store at Currys but just £281 from [www.pixmania.co.uk](http://www.pixmania.co.uk). The Archos is a music and video player with great battery life for listening to music and decent sound quality. For Best Buys from our latest MP3 test, see p40.



Average online saving  
**19%**

### DVD RECORDERS

We saved £47 on the Sony RDR-GX310, which was only £253 online at [www.hiwayhifi.com](http://www.hiwayhifi.com) but was priced at £300 in store at Argos. The RDR-GX310 is a great recorder and has a digital tuner, so you can record one Freeview channel while watching another.

However, savings on other Best Buys were less impressive and we found some models cheaper on the high street. The Pioneer DVR-230S-S was £29 cheaper at Richer Sounds (£100) than it was online.



Average online saving  
**13%**

### PHOTO PRINTERS

We saved £70 on the Samsung SPP-2040 – it cost just £60 at [www.pcworld.co.uk](http://www.pcworld.co.uk), compared with £130 in store at Argos. In our tests, this model was rated a Best Buy thanks to its ability to quickly produce good-quality prints with accurate colours.

However, potential savings on other printers varied considerably during our research. We saved £70 on the HP Photosmart 475 in July, for example, only to find it £60 cheaper on the high street at PC World in August.



Average online saving  
**13%**

### DIGITAL CAMERAS

The Best Buy Sony Cyber-shot DSC-R1 is fast, takes excellent flash photos and is great for wide-angle shots. You could pay £700 for it on the high street but we found it on sale for just £516 online, saving ourselves £184. We found lots of other savings online – only two cameras out of the 11 we price-checked worked out cheaper on the high street. Best value on the high street was the Canon PowerShot A610, which cost £140 at Argos.



Average online saving  
**12%**

### PERSONAL VIDEO RECORDERS

When we went shopping for personal video recorders (PVRs), our biggest saving was £88 on the Best Buy Sony RDR-HXD710 DVD PVR, which was £362 at [www.rgbdirect.co.uk](http://www.rgbdirect.co.uk) but £450 at Currys. This DVD-PVR combi makes brilliant DVDs, the PVR stores up to 80 hours of programmes, and the picture and sound quality are excellent. All of the other Best Buys in our survey were cheaper online – the average saving was 12 per cent – but some savings were tiny. The DigiFusion FVRT200 PVR, for example, was only £4 cheaper.



Average online saving  
**8%**

### DIGITAL RADIOS

We saved £29 on the Tivoli Audio Model DAB radio by shopping online. This model was rated a Best Buy in our last test thanks to its high sound quality and the fact that it can receive FM and MW radio as well as DAB. The cheapest price we found it selling for on the high street was £229 at John Lewis but it was available for just £200 at [www.hifix.co.uk](http://www.hifix.co.uk). Online savings for other models were small and two out of the four models we looked for were cheaper on the high street. For Best Buys from our latest test, see 'Radio times', p72.



Average online saving  
**4%**

### TELEVISIONS

Only four Best Buys were available both online and on the high street for comparison in July or August and we didn't find many bargains online. Our biggest saving was £162 on the Panasonic TH-42PV500B plasma TV, which has an excellent high-definition picture and good sound quality (£2,033 at [www.shopbyprice.co.uk](http://www.shopbyprice.co.uk) and £2,195 in store at John Lewis). But another Best Buy model was only £4 cheaper online once you'd paid £25 for delivery, and the Pioneer PDP-436FDE was actually £7 cheaper in store at Richer Sounds.



Average online saving  
**4%**

### CAMCORDERS

The compact Best Buy Panasonic SDR-S100 produces really sharp video footage which looks great when played back on a TV. It also takes great digital snaps. We found it on sale for just £690 at [www.purelygadgets.co.uk](http://www.purelygadgets.co.uk). The cheapest in-store price was £1,000 at Jessops.

Online retailers aren't always cheaper, though, for Best Buy camcorders. We found the Panasonic NV-GS150 on sale at PC World for £245 less than we found it anywhere on the web, while the Panasonic NV-GS75 was the same price online as it was in store at Comet.

## ONLINE SHOPPING

### WEBSITES YOU CAN RELY ON

Getting a great price isn't the be-all and end-all of online shopping, of course. Finding a retailer who's got the products you want in stock and can be relied on to deliver them on time is important, too.

Most big high-street chains have websites to compete with internet giants such as Amazon but they don't always offer the best service, according to our research.

### Books, CDs and DVDs

Three websites got top marks from *Which?* readers for book, CD and DVD purchases. They were abebooks.co.uk, amazon.co.uk and play.com. Over 70 per cent of people who had used these sites would definitely recommend them to a friend. Members told us that Abebooks was easy to use, while Amazon was rated highly for its broad range. Bargain hunters should also visit thebookpeople.co.uk – 54 per cent of respondents reckoned prices on this site were excellent, although it wasn't rated as highly overall.

Big brands WH Smith, HMV and Tesco were among those sites which got fewer

recommendations from *Which?* readers. Only 4 per cent of respondents rated whsmith.co.uk's range as excellent, compared with 39 per cent for Amazon's.

### Clothes and accessories

Buying clothes online can be tricky (you can't try things on in cyberspace), which may explain why no retailers stood out as being particularly impressive. Prices at mandmdirect.com were rated as very good or excellent by 73 per cent of respondents, but availability of items was an issue. Next.co.uk offers the best delivery and product range, according to our survey. Debenhams.com and additionsdirect.co.uk failed to impress in any area.

### Electrical items

Johnlewis.com and amazon.co.uk are *Which?* readers' favourite sites for buying electrical items such as photography and audio equipment. Both were rated above average for their overall service, ease of finding items and delivery. You were less impressed with the websites of Comet, Currys, Argos, Pixmania and Dixons.

## Your shopping rights

**Peter McCarthy of Which? Legal Service**  
([which.co.uk/legalservice](http://which.co.uk/legalservice)) explains your rights

### ■ COOLING-OFF PERIOD

Under the Distance Selling Regulations you have from the day you order until seven working days from the day after you receive goods to change your mind and return them. Items you can't return include magazines and CDs or DVDs that have been unsealed and any bespoke goods.

### ■ USE A CREDIT CARD

If the goods cost more than £100 (but less than

£30,000) and the amount put on your card is less than £25,000, your credit card company will be just as liable as the trader if there is a problem with the goods.

### ■ BROKEN IN TRANSIT?

The seller is responsible for the goods until they are handed over to you. So if an item is damaged, you can send it back and get a replacement or refund. In this case, you don't have to pay the cost of returning it.

### Contacts

[www.froogle.co.uk](http://www.froogle.co.uk)  
[www.kelkoo.co.uk](http://www.kelkoo.co.uk)  
[www.pricerunner.co.uk](http://www.pricerunner.co.uk)  
[www.shopping.com](http://www.shopping.com)

## Our research

In June and July, we asked 5,677 *Which?* members online to rate websites they'd recently used to buy books, CDs and DVDs, clothes and electrical items.

### MEMBER BENEFIT

### £1 off Which? book

From faulty goods to holiday nightmares, *160 Letters that Get Results* explains how to complain. It's available at £10.99 (£1 off the RRP), with free p&p, until 30 November 2006. Call **01903 828557** or email [mailorder@lbsltd.co.uk](mailto:mailorder@lbsltd.co.uk), quoting code 160W1106 and ISBN 978-18-4490-01-14.



## THE WEBSITES YOU ARE MOST LIKELY TO RECOMMEND TO A FRIEND

### BOOKS/CDs/DVDs

	%
1 <a href="http://www.abebooks.co.uk">www.abebooks.co.uk</a> (69)	77
2 <a href="http://www.play.com">www.play.com</a> (381)	72
3 <a href="http://www.amazon.co.uk">www.amazon.co.uk</a> (2610)	71
4 <a href="http://www.CD-wow.com">www.CD-wow.com</a> (253)	61
5 <a href="http://www.thebookpeople.co.uk">www.thebookpeople.co.uk</a> (81)	60
6 Non-UK Amazon sites (116)	55
7 <a href="http://www.choicesuk.com">www.choicesuk.com</a> (32)	47
8 <a href="http://www.tesco.com">www.tesco.com</a> (203)	44
9 <a href="http://www.101CD.com">www.101CD.com</a> (47)	43
10 <a href="http://www.dvd.co.uk">www.dvd.co.uk</a> (40)	40
11 <a href="http://www.whsmith.co.uk">www.whsmith.co.uk</a> (52)	33
12 <a href="http://www.hmv.co.uk">www.hmv.co.uk</a> (90)	31

(Sample sizes in brackets)

### CLOTHES/ ACCESSORIES

	%
1 <a href="http://www.mandmdirect.com">www.mandmdirect.com</a> (37)	51
2 <a href="http://www.johnlewis.com">www.johnlewis.com</a> (62)	50
3 <a href="http://www.cottontraders.co.uk">www.cottontraders.co.uk</a> (133)	47
4 <a href="http://www.next.co.uk">www.next.co.uk</a> (201)	47
5 <a href="http://www.boden.co.uk">www.boden.co.uk</a> (130)	46
6 <a href="http://www.landsend.co.uk">www.landsend.co.uk</a> (170)	45
7 <a href="http://www.marksandspencer.com">www.marksandspencer.com</a> (235)	45
8 <a href="http://www.hawkshead.com">www.hawkshead.com</a> (30)	43
9 <a href="http://www.redoute.co.uk">www.redoute.co.uk</a> (97)	34
10 <a href="http://www.debenhams.com">www.debenhams.com</a> (33)	9
11 <a href="http://www.additionsdirect.co.uk">www.additionsdirect.co.uk</a> (30)	7

### ELECTRICAL ITEMS

	%
1 <a href="http://www.johnlewis.com">www.johnlewis.com</a> (165)	67
2 <a href="http://www.amazon.co.uk">www.amazon.co.uk</a> (709)	64
3 <a href="http://www.hughesdirect.co.uk">www.hughesdirect.co.uk</a> (99)	60
4 <a href="http://www.apple.com">www.apple.com</a> (84)	57
5 <a href="http://www.dabs.com">www.dabs.com</a> (190)	57
6 Non-UK Amazon sites (31)	52
7 <a href="http://www.tesco.com">www.tesco.com</a> (101)	50
8 <a href="http://www.ebuyer.com">www.ebuyer.com</a> (125)	49
9 <a href="http://www.empiredirect.co.uk">www.empiredirect.co.uk</a> (83)	48
10 <a href="http://www.comet.co.uk">www.comet.co.uk</a> (152)	32
11 <a href="http://www.currys.co.uk">www.currys.co.uk</a> (90)	31
12 <a href="http://www.argos.co.uk">www.argos.co.uk</a> (167)	29
13 <a href="http://www.pixmania.com">www.pixmania.com</a> (82)	26
14 <a href="http://www.dixons.co.uk">www.dixons.co.uk</a> (38)	13

