



Which? research shows how you could save almost £400 shopping online for 28 gifts this Christmas

# ONLINE VS HIGH STREET

Christmas shopping can be a trying experience, but finding the right shops and the best value deals can ease the headache. To help make this year's present shopping easier, Which? researchers put on their comfortable shoes and scoured high-street shops to compare their prices with online prices on the same day.

Surprisingly, we found that the cheapest prices aren't always on the net – in fact, you can often get a good deal at supermarkets. This should please the 43% of members who told us they get most or all of their presents in shops – mainly because they like to be able to see what they're buying. But the 18% of you who like to buy most or all of your presents online will be happy to hear that, overall, you are likely to make the biggest savings.

Wherever you like to shop, use the results of our investigation and turn to p24 to read our top tips on

how to help you make the most of your hard-earned cash and shop safely this Christmas.

## Online winners

The results of our research were conclusive. For our Christmas shopping list of 28 products (see p24) we could have saved a total of £383 online, compared to the typical high-street prices we found. Overall, we found the best savings online were for fragrances and electronics.

A 100ml bottle of Calvin Klein Eternity for Men was £18 cheaper online, and a 50ml bottle of Dior J'adore perfume was £7 cheaper. Our biggest individual online saving was for a Samsung TV. It was going for £310 at Ajelectronics.co.uk – £69 cheaper than the typical high-street price (£379) that we found at three well-known chains, including Currys and John Lewis.

Our largest online savings were for electrical goods. We saved:

■ Almost £29 off the typical high street price of £150 for a Which? Best Buy Humax set-top box from Amazon Marketplace seller Roseparrot.

■ £38 on an Altec MP3 Speaker Dock. It was just over £112 at Amazon.co.uk – and, though Currys sold it for about £130, it was typically around £150 on the high street.

■ £33 on some Babyliss hair straighteners – they were going for £65 at Gordons-chemist.com, compared to just under £98 at Argos and Boots.

When you find a cheap deal, remember to check the website to make sure it's reputable – look for return policies and clear contact details such as telephone numbers and addresses.

### Local and supermarket deals

Though the high street generally failed to give us a better price, walking into the supermarket could have saved us a little on some entertainment items – particularly CDs, books, DVDs and Blu-ray discs. We found:

■ *Jamie's America* by Jamie Oliver for £10 in Tesco – nearly £3 less than the cheapest online shop, which was Play.com.

■ *The Boat that Rocked* DVD for £9 in Asda and Morrisons, almost £3 off the cheapest online price at Amazon.co.uk.

■ *Gladiator* Blu-ray disc for £13 in Morrisons – £2 off the best online price at Blahdvd.com.

Visiting local independent stores can also be worthwhile. Our search for the Panasonic DMP BD-35 Blu-ray player found a local independent that sold the Which? Best Buy for £179 – more than £10 cheaper than the best online price at Amazon Marketplace.

And if you're after the PSP console this year and don't want to buy online, we found it's also worth checking out local independents. We found it only 5p more expensive in an independent store than the cheapest online price (£129.95 at Johnlewis.com).

### Up and down prices

Even though shopping online was generally better value, online prices change regularly and our weekly price

tracking of 30 products for 12 weeks (see 'Our research', p24) saw constant fluctuations. We found you could have paid £100 extra for a Samsung TV depending on when you bought it from Play.com – in week seven it was considerably more expensive than it was the week before and week after.

It was a similar story with fragrances. Eternity for Men was £39 at Strawberry.net at both the start and end of our tracking, but the 10 weeks in between revealed it was anywhere between £39.50 (week 2) and £23.50 (weeks 8 and 10), a difference of £16.

At three well-known online music stores (Amazon.co.uk, Play.com and HMV.com), the prices of one CD and one DVD had dropped respectively by at least £4 and £5 by week 12.

Both titles were released shortly before we started our tracking, showing that waiting a few weeks instead of snapping up new releases could save you money.

Sometimes if a price dropped at one store, others would follow suit, either the same week or a week later. Our Pure Evoke Flow digital radio dropped in price to just under £119 in week eight on Amazon.co.uk, then Dixons.co.uk had the same price a week later. We also saw a Samsung TV drop to £344.99 in price at Currys, Comet and Argos in week nine – the previous week it had been £379 at Currys, and £349.99 at Comet and Argos.

We asked price comparison website Pricerunner why online shops regularly change their prices. Marc Thomas, UK country manager, told us: 'It's no surprise that retailers are adjusting their online prices – particularly in the face of extremely testing conditions on the high street.'

'We've noticed that many online retailers – particularly those selling TVs and digital cameras – are adopting increasingly sophisticated pricing strategies, changing their prices according to the time of the day and in response to customer demand. It's a phenomenon we're likely to see more of.'



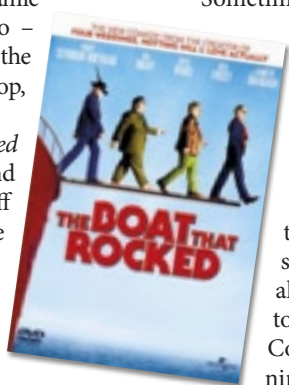
**£40**

saved on four fragrances online, compared to typical high street prices



**£389**

is the average amount members plan to spend on Christmas presents this year



**£268**

saved on ten electrical products online, compared to typical high street prices



## Where to shop?

Those of you who prefer the high street will be pleased to hear that using local independents needn't cost you extra every time. And your supermarket could be the cheapest place to shop if your Christmas shopping list is packed with CDs, DVDs and books.

You can also use the online prices you find as a starting point for haggling on the high street to drive those prices down even more.

But for the price-conscious, online is generally your best bet for low prices. We found substantial savings, particularly

on electronics and fragrances. And if you want that must-have toy for your children this Christmas, getting it online could also save you pennies – and the hassles of trawling the high street.

You can use the 'compare features and prices' tool within each product review on **Which.co.uk** to find the latest online deals for many products – just click on the shop you want and you can buy it there and then.

If you don't feel confident shopping online, follow our

advice, right, to make sure that you make the most of your hard-earned money and know how to shop safely.



### WHAT WE SHOPPED FOR

**FRAGRANCES** Calvin Klein Eternity for Men Eau de Toilette Spray 100 ml, Hugo Boss Boss In Motion Eau de Toilette 90ml, Jean Paul Gaultier Classique Eau de Toilette Spray 50ml, Christian Dior J'Adore Eau de Parfum Spray 50ml  
**ELECTRONICS** Samsung LE32B450 LCD TV, Panasonic DMPBD35 Blu-ray player, Sony PSP 3000 console, Pure Evoke Flow digital radio, Humax Foxsat HD set-top box, Humax PVR-9300T PVR, Canon Digital Ixus 95 IS digital camera, Apple iPod Touch 8GB, Sony NWZ-W202 2GB MP3 player, Altec Lansing T612 MP3 speaker dock, Babyliss 2034U Pro 230 Radiance hair straighteners  
**BOOKS** *Silent Scream* by Lynda La Plante, *Jamie's America* by Jamie Oliver, *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* by Antony Beevor (hardback), *The Angel's Game* by Carlos Ruiz Zafon (hardback)  
**CDs** *A Hard Day's Night* by the Beatles, *Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band: Greatest Hits*, *Midlife: A Beginner's Guide To Blur* (double CD)  
**DVDs** *Wuthering Heights*, *The Boat That Rocked*, *Che Parts 1 and 2*, *Revolutionary Road*,  
**BLU-RAY DISCS** *Gladiator* Special Edition two-disc, *Lost Season 1*, *Gran Torino*  
**GAMES** Mini Ninjas Xbox 360 game, Transformers 2: Revenge Of The Fallen X-Box 360 game, Guitar Hero 5 (Guitar pack) PS3 game, Fuel PS3 game, Colin McRae: Dirt 2 Nintendo Wii game, EA Sports Grand Slam Tennis With Wii Motion Plus Nintendo Wii game  
**TOYS** Transformers Revenge of The Fallen Leader Optimus Prime toy, Star Wars 8019 Republic Attack Shuttle Lego, Barbie and The 3 Musketeers Corinne doll, Barbie Rapunzel Cut n Style doll, Guess Who? Extra board game



## Which? online Make money shopping online

There are more than 120 cashback sites offering you money just for shopping at your favourite online retailers by clicking through them.

To find out more about how to make money while shopping online, visit [www.which.co.uk/cashbacksites](http://www.which.co.uk/cashbacksites). And, to find out how to get a good deal, go to [www.which.co.uk/haggling](http://www.which.co.uk/haggling) and [www.which.co.uk/discounts](http://www.which.co.uk/discounts).

To find out which online shops Which? members think are best, take a look at [www.which.co.uk/online retailers](http://www.which.co.uk/online retailers), and for more tips about online safety, visit [www.which.co.uk/shopsafelyonline](http://www.which.co.uk/shopsafelyonline).

### OUR RESEARCH

In July 2009, Which? asked 2,409 online panel members where they bought their Christmas presents last year.

On 11 September 2009, Which? researchers shopped online and in London high-street shops and supermarkets to collect prices for 28 products. We compared our online prices (which include the

standard delivery charge) with the typical price you would most likely find in the high street, and also noted which individual shops offered the cheapest prices.

In addition to this, once a week for 12 weeks (from 3 July until 18 September 2009) we tracked the prices of 30 products at a range of online shops.

## Shop online safely

Advice from Which? staff and members for a safe, convenient and value-for-money online shopping experience

*'The Distance Selling Regulations give you the right to return most items bought online – high-street shops don't have to accept returns if you've simply changed your mind.'*

Peter McCarthy,  
Which? Legal Service



*'One website that's improved my search for value for money is Idealo.co.uk, which can send you alerts when an item is available below your target price.'*

James Auton,  
Snaith, East Yorkshire



*'To be safe, use directories such as Safebuy.org.uk or Shopsafe.co.uk that list shops offering secure credit card transactions and clear delivery prices and returns policies.'*

Matt Bath,  
Which? technology editor



*'Enter the shop's name in Google plus the word "complaint". If there are lots of complaints and people have not been happy with the shop's handling of them, steer clear.'*

Andy Stedman,  
Pinner, Middlesex



*'Sign up to your favourite online shop's newsletters – you may get some great discounts or free delivery, or be first in line for promotions and offers.'*

Sarah Dennis,  
Which? shopping expert

