



Shauna Loughery saves money and avoids the stress of Christmas shopping by going online

Can you bag a bargain online?

We reveal whether it's cheaper to buy Christmas presents online or on your local high street

Shauna Loughery from Limavady, Northern Ireland, has been doing her annual Christmas shop online for the past three years: 'I've never had any problems and I get to avoid screaming kids and being shoved around by the crowds.' Shauna's used sites including Amazon (www.amazon.co.uk), Marks & Spencer (www.marksandspencer.com) and Play (www.play.com) and says they've all been fantastic. But her favourite store is www.iwantoneofthose.com: 'The site's descriptions are perfect and delivery always seems a day faster than anyone else's.'

In many ways, Shauna is right to shop online. Recent research carried out by the Office of Fair Trading estimated that UK shoppers could be missing out on savings of up to £240 million a year by not shopping online. So to see whether you could bag a bargain, we trawled the internet looking for the best deals on popular Christmas presents – including 33 Best Buys – and compared them with high-street prices.

A click away

We found many great deals by looking online – we saved £1,053 on a shopping list comprising an LCD TV,

camera, camcorder, hi-fi and DVD recorder. But for some items, such as games consoles, you're better off on the high street. The results are shown opposite. To help you with your own Christmas shopping, we've also listed the items that gave us the biggest savings and the cheapest place to buy them both online and on the high street.

For tips on shopping safely online, a step-by-step guide on how to find the best prices, and reasons why price isn't the only reason you buy Christmas presents online, turn to p32.

As for Shauna, she does intend to still go to the high street – 'just to soak up some of the Christmas atmosphere and feel very smug as I watch other people trying to carry their own weight in gifts.'

OUR RESEARCH

We visited 111 different retailers and collected prices on 72 different products in August 2007. The median prices of online and high-street stores were compared to work out a typical online saving. All online prices include delivery.

Each 'Best saving' is an example of the individual product that provided the biggest saving – we also provide details of how much this product cost at the cheapest online and high-street stores.



Digital cameras

Typical online saving 19%

We found that you can get substantial savings on five Best Buy digital cameras by doing your shopping online. We found savings ranging from £18 to £92.

Best saving Olympus SP-550 UZ

Cheapest online store

www.purelygadgets.co.uk, £255

Cheapest high-street store Currys, £330



LCD/plasma TVs

Typical online saving 29%

There are some incredible bargains to be had by buying your next television online. During our research (see 'Our research', below), we found that www.digital-point.co.uk was consistently one of the cheapest websites.

Best saving Sony KDL-40W2000U Bravia

Cheapest online stores www.digital-point.co.uk, www.digitechelectronics.com, www.rgbdirect.co.uk, £981

Cheapest high-street store John Lewis, £1,499



DVDs

Typical online saving 2% for DVDs/31% for high-definition HD-DVD and Blu-ray discs

Shopping online didn't typically offer large savings for DVDs, but it certainly pays off for high-definition discs.

Best saving Doctor Who complete series 2 DVD/Pirates of the Caribbean Blu-ray disc

Cheapest online stores DVD: www.cdwow.co.uk, £37.99. Blu-ray disc: www.choicesuk.com, £17.89 **Cheapest high-street stores** HMV and Virgin for both disc types, £70 DVD/£27 Blu-ray



Digital camcorders

Typical online saving 11%

Not all camcorders were cheaper online – the Hitachi DZ-HS300E was typically around £30 cheaper on the high street. However, for all of the other digital camcorders we looked at, we found that the online stores' prices still beat the high street's.

Best saving Panasonic VDR-D310

Cheapest online store

www.ajelectronics.co.uk, £360

Cheapest high-street store Argos, £500



Digital radios

Typical online saving 11%

Shopping online for this popular Christmas present will typically save you around £17 – enough for a few extra stocking fillers to please anyone who's been a particularly good boy or girl this year.

Best saving Pure Evoke 3

Cheapest online stores www.electricwarehouse.co.uk, www.dixons.co.uk, £165

Cheapest high-street store

John Lewis, £199



CDs

Typical online saving 7%

You can make small savings by shopping online – we found consistently low prices at www.dvd.co.uk. Supermarkets also offered some good deals, but we weren't always able to find the gifts we wanted, as we found they had limited stock.

Best saving *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, The Beatles

Cheapest online store www.dvd.co.uk, £6.49

Cheapest high-street store Sainsbury's, £9.77



DVD players/recorders

Typical online saving 12%

Two of our Best Buys – the Panasonic DMR-ES15EBS and Sony DVPNS15 – were slightly cheaper on the high street, while three other Sony Best Buys all offered average savings of 15 per cent and more online.

Best saving Sony RDRGX360

Cheapest online stores www.electrosaver.co.uk, www.digitaldirectuk.com, www.soundandvisiononline.com, £140

Cheapest high-street store John Lewis, £199



Micro hi-fis

Typical online saving 23%

If you're looking to spoil someone with the ultimate in stereo sound, try the Best Buy Denon DF103HRDAB – it comes with lots of fancy features, including a built-in DAB radio and a 40GB hard disk. We saved more than £250 by shopping online.

Best saving Denon DF103HRDAB

Cheapest online store

www.hughesdirect.co.uk, £738

Cheapest high-street store John Lewis, £999



MP3/MP4 players

Typical online saving 11%

If you are looking to buy an MP3 or MP4 player, BT (www.shop.bt.com) and www.amazon.co.uk offered some of the best deals – so check them out first. Not sure which model to buy? You'll find our latest MP3 and MP4 player test results on p48.

Best saving Apple iPod 30GB

Cheapest online store

www.shop.bt.com, £149

Cheapest high-street store John Lewis, £179

Games consoles

No overall savings

Prices for games consoles, such as the Wii, Xbox 360 and PS3, are similar wherever you shop. The trick to bagging a bargain is to discover which store offers the most extras.

For example, while John Lewis sells the PS3 for £398, HMV sells it for £425 but with four games (which cost up to £50 each) and an extra controller – which is the best deal we found.

Best saving Xbox 360 Premium Console

Cheapest online store www.play.com, £280

Cheapest high-street store Currys, £265

including a free game



Books

Typical online saving 14%

Shopping online typically offered better savings and the website www.play.com consistently had the cheapest prices.

Supermarkets Tesco and Asda did offer the best prices for certain titles, but between them they had only four of the ten books on our shopping list.

Best saving *The Lord of the Rings* boxed set, JRR Tolkien (ISBN 9780007203635)

Cheapest online store www.whsmith.co.uk,

£16.59 **Cheapest high-street stores**

Waterstones and Borders, £30



Champagne

Typical online saving 2% (six bottles)

Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without a spot of the sparkly stuff, in this case one of our Best Buys, Lanson Black Label. However, with most online stores requiring a minimum purchase of six bottles, you need to buy in bulk to make savings.

Best saving Lanson Black Label Champagne

Cheapest online store

www.virginwines.co.uk, £125.93 for six bottles

Cheapest high-street stores Nicolas, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Threshers, £143.94 for six bottles



Treasure hunt Our pricing expert shows you how to search for the best deals online

To help you find the best deals, each month our pricing team checks hundreds of high-street and online prices. Our expert, Nicola Sells, offers a step-by-step guide to searching for the cheapest prices.



Step 1

We use a combination of price-comparison sites – if you use just one you may miss out on some good deals. For example, PriceRunner is easy to search but doesn't always include Argos and Tesco Direct; Kelkoo is particularly good for household appliances; and Google Products Search has a wide range of products and includes some stores not listed by PriceRunner.

Rating	Availability	Price	Price incl. delivery
5.0 reviews CUSTOMER CERTIFIED	In stock	£830 200907	£839 Go to store
4.2 reviews CUSTOMER CERTIFIED	In stock	£845.88 200907	£845.66 Go to store
4.0 reviews	In stock	£847 200907	£847 Go to store

Step 2

Check that prices quoted include delivery charges and VAT. Some delivery costs can be very high, particularly on large household appliances like fridge-freezers (you will usually pay between £15 and £30 for standard delivery). Also, look out for stores that include installation and disposal in their prices, as these can add value to your deal. PriceRunner and Google Products Search include delivery in their comparisons.

Step 3

Before you type in your card details, check the web page is secure – its address will start with https, instead of http. Depending on which program you use to surf the internet, you may also see a padlock symbol at either the top or bottom of the web page. Double-click the padlock to reveal a digital certificate confirming the site is secure.



Checklist

Tips to help you get the best possible online experience

■ **Be organised** Order gifts online as early as possible to ensure they're delivered in time.

■ **Where to shop** Choose a familiar high-street store or go to www.shopsafe.co.uk – this website lists only stores that have clear delivery prices and returns policies, and offer secure credit card transactions.

■ **Returning faulty goods**

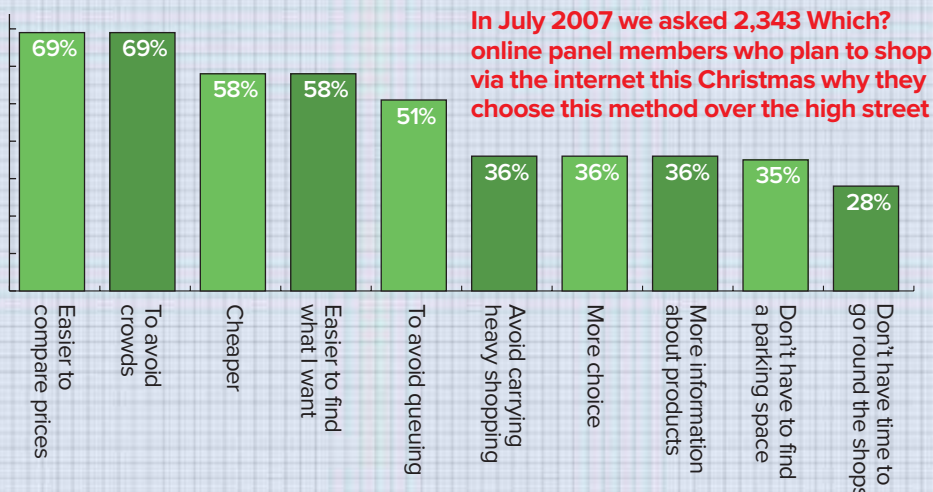
Under the Sale of Goods Act 1979, you can reject a wrong order or items that are faulty. Ask the seller to pick the products up for nothing or to refund you the cost of postage.

■ **Unwanted goods** Under the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulations 2000, you can cancel at any time from when you place an order online up to seven working days from the day after you get the goods. Outside the cooling-off period? Check the terms and conditions, as some companies give you longer. The terms and conditions should also say who pays for postage – otherwise the seller pays.

■ **Exempt items** Unless your order's wrong or the goods are faulty, some unwanted items can't be returned. This includes unwrapped CDs, DVDs and video games, and perishables such as flowers or food.

■ **Extra security** Many online retailers require you to register with a service called 'Verified by Visa' or 'Verified by MasterCard'. This aims to protect your card from unauthorised use.

TOP TEN REASONS WHY YOU BUY GIFTS ONLINE



Contacts

Google Product Search
www.google.co.uk/products
 Kelkoo www.kelkoo.co.uk
 Office of Fair Trading 0845 722 4499
www.oft.gov.uk
 PriceRunner www.pricerunner.co.uk