

Holiday Guide



YOUR GUIDE TO THE HOLIDAY SEASON ON THE NORTH SHORE

It's time to get organized

MARIE POTTER, contributing writer

There's no way around it, by Nov. 1 you would have noticed the holiday season is around the corner.

Whether you're a planner or a procrastinator, here's some shopping tips to help you save money and time, and reduce stress over the holidays.

ONLINE SHOPPING STRATEGIES

If you have any ability to plan ahead, start early. Take advantage of technology and use a smart phone app to ensure your gift list is with you at all times. Better yet, use Pinterest as a playground to create a visual gift list and idea repository. Be sure to tag the board as "secret" to keep it private. Many stores offer exclusive online sales or special promotional codes. Subscribe to email newsletters from stores you'll be shopping at to get "online only" offers or advance notification of sales. You can

unsubscribe later while you recover from seasonal spending.

IN-STORE SHOPPING STRATEGIES

With your list in hand, start watching flyers and create a folder to collect pages into or use a Post-it note to mark a page with a gift you want to purchase. Bring the flyer or folder with you when you shop, so you can ask a sales associate where an item is located, or check on incoming inventory or stock in another store.

Another important strategy is timing. There are smart times to block off on your calendar as "shop time." If you shop a half an hour before the store closes during the week it's usually quieter. You can get more done in that half an hour than if you spent a whole afternoon there, especially if you hit a couple of stores in that time. Alternately, plan to shop early Saturday or Sunday morning when people are sleeping in or recovering from holiday celebrations.

Procrastinators should check out stores that are open 24 hours a day. There might not be as much selection closer to Christmas, but you can shop at some really odd hours and avoid the crowds. Another time-saver is to call the store ahead, ask them to put your item aside at the front desk, run in and quickly pick it up. Whatever you do, avoid shopping at lunch when everyone else is shopping.

Knowing exactly what you want, when the sale is, and checking on availability before you set foot out the door will save you hours.

WRAPPING STRATEGIES

Some people will wrap as soon as they bring home a present, but it is more efficient to wrap everything at once especially if you buy gifts early. If



you tend to leave it to the last minute and end up wrapping into the wee hours of the morning take the batch-wrapping approach:

Buy all the supplies, including wrapping paper, ribbons, cards, tape, stamps and sticky notes (keep in mind gift bags and tissue are your quickest way to wrap). Use the sticky notes to indicate who gets what on each present in the pre-wrap stage. Set up a wrapping station, put on some music, grab a hot cocoa or a special coffee and enjoy the process.

Create an annual list of gifts to track what you gave and what you got, and check off that you thanked the gift-giver.

SMART STRATEGIES

Buy a random gift for the

unexpected visitor or the forgotten. If it's not needed you can add it to your gift box for another time.

Simply shop early. A good shopper will have all their gifts by Dec. 15, a great shopper will have all their gifts by Nov. 30, and a stellar shopper will shop for gifts for the next year just after the holidays to take advantage of blow-out sales, or will shop throughout the year.

Consider a "gifts-for-kids-only" approach, and donate more to those less fortunate. This will reduce your overall shopping time and contribute to a world where less is more.

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