

Holiday Deals for Online Shoppers

The Motley Fool

By *Elizabeth Brokamp*

This year, as in years past, I will shop almost exclusively online for holiday gifts. I love the convenience, the fact that I don't have to take along my toddler (except for rides in our swiveling office chair), and the ease of using comparison shopping sites like Froogle to bargain-hunt.

The one thing I despise about shopping online is the shipping fees, and I'm not alone. According to a study conducted by Jupiter Research a few years ago, high shipping fees were the No. 1 reason customers abandoned their online shopping carts. Consumers resent the feeling of being blindsided by excessive shipping charges, often not revealed until the last step of the online shopping process. "There's so much competition for my business," says Jodie Burns of Alexandria, Va. "I don't need to pay outrageous shipping fees when I can just find the item cheaper within a matter of minutes online."

Merchants are standing up and taking notice this year. Many of the big online stores are offering discounted or free shipping deals this season in order to secure your business. But not without strings attached, of course.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when you're searching for a deal on shipping:

- 1. Take notice of the exclusions .** Often "free shipping" deals exclude purchases such as oversized or unusually heavy items, gift certificates, or items for which you are using another promotional code. Some merchants maintain lists of items that are eligible for free shipping, steering you toward higher-priced items, items for which they have excess inventory, or items that net greater profit. Retailers may also require that the entire order ship to the same destination in order to receive the savings.
- 2. Check the estimated shipping date .** Some "free shipping" offers come at the price of speed. For example, Booksamillion.com indicates that free shipping orders have an estimated shipping time of four to 10 business days, while the standard shipping window is just three to seven business days. Add on time for "order processing," and you may be waiting a while for your merchandise.
- 3. Be wary of the "minimum purchase" bait .** Most merchants simply can't afford to absorb all of the shipping costs for their merchandise, so they compromise by offering free shipping on larger orders. While this makes good business sense, it may also induce you to buy things you don't need simply to qualify for the savings.

Still, if you take a few moments to shop around, you can save big on your holiday orders with free shipping deals. Here are just a few of the online retailers hoping to attract your interest (and your dollars) with deals on shipping this Christmas. Please note that each store has its own rules and restrictions for free shipping, so check the fine print to avoid unpleasant surprises.



Amazon.com: Free “super saver” shipping on orders of \$25 or more, with restrictions.

Barnes & Noble: Free shipping on orders of \$25 or more. There are a number of exclusions you’ll want to be sure to check.

Booksamillion: Free shipping on orders of \$25 or more. Free shipping orders may take longer than standard shipping.

BlueNile: Shipping is always free on every order. Customers can opt to pay more for faster shipping.

Circuit City: Free shipping for orders above \$24 before taxes and shipping fees. Certain TVs and larger items cannot be shipped.

CompUSA: Free shipping for orders of \$150 or more.

Home Depot: Holiday shipping is free for most items above \$49.

Lowe’s: Free shipping for orders of \$49 or more. Items must weigh less than 150 lbs., among other restrictions.

Nordstrom: Free shipping for online orders of \$100 or more through Dec. 19.

Red Envelope: Offers a “free shipping collection” with items starting at \$99.

Target: Free shipping applies to specially marked items.

Tower Records: Free shipping on purchases of \$20 or more.

Toys R Us: Free shipping applies to qualifying purchases of \$49 or more.

Zappos.com: Free shipping is standard, with a guarantee of delivery in four to five days.

*For even more money-saving tips, take **Motley Fool GreenLight** for a test drive. Each issue promises to make or save you at least \$450. Best of all, it’s **free to try** for 30 days.*

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