



Preparing for the Holidays

Every year it seems the Holiday season comes earlier and earlier. Even now, stores are stocking their shelves with enticements galore to get you to start thinking about your gifts and décor shopping as soon as possible. It's easy to get caught up in the elegant surroundings, festive music, and home-baked smells that go hand-in-hand with the season; however, be careful that you don't lose sight of your bottom line in the process.

The best holidays are those that don't cause us to accumulate more debt, but avoiding that trap can be difficult. Use these three tips to keep your holiday spending in check:

Create lists, lists, and more lists.

Sticking to a list is the most effective way to avoid making impulse purchases - those last minute items that usually are responsible for blowing the entire budget.

Start off with a gift list and jot down all your intended giftees and the gift you plan to purchase for each individual. Then do some quick online comparison shopping to know who offers that item for the best price. The early-bird advantage: the earlier you make your list the more time you have to take advantage of pre-holiday sales.

Don't forget the food, décor and other household items. Making lists and comparison shopping for these items is just as important as your gift list. Again, making your list early means you won't be prone to last-minute shopping when people are most likely to give in to impulse buying.

Plan Shopping Trips in Advance

Now that you know what you're buying and where you need to go, create a shopping list for each store (yes - back to those lists again) and the best route of travel for your entire trip. The advantage: you save time and gas by avoiding multiple trips and money by sticking to your list.

Don't forget to consider online shopping to save yourself some stops altogether. However, be careful that you check shipping costs and return policies. Sometimes shipping or returning an item from an online retailer is much more expensive than just visiting the store and purchasing the goods in person.

Pay in Cash.

This important tip cannot be emphasized enough. Make a commitment to pay with cash and take only the amount you need with you to the store. Paying with a debit card is the same as using cash, but it's easier to overspend with plastic so make sure you stick to your list.

Likewise, leave the credit cards at home. Not having any extra credit on hand makes it almost impossible to give in to impulse spending. If you only have the cash you need with you and you stick to your list, you shouldn't have any money left to make unplanned purchases.

For additional tips as well as steps for incorporating your holiday expenditures into your monthly spending plan, visit the www.ConsumerCents.com website and download the free Holiday Spending Guide.