If you want to save money, this is the time to make your resolutions -- not after the New Year.

$ Cut your gift list. The easiest way to reduce how much you spend during the holidays is to exchange gifts with fewer people than you have in the past. Are there a few people on your list that you can mark off this year? To avoid awkward situations, talk to those people in advance and agree that, in the name of saving money and reducing stress, you will forego the gifts but will get together to do something you both enjoy -- such as going to a movie or volunteer together.

$ Find alternatives to purchased gifts. Maybe stopping abruptly on a gift-exchange with certain people does not feel right. But you do not have to go overboard, and you certainly are not obligated to buy a gift. Try being creative with alternatives such as homemade treats, a coupon for your services such as setting up a home filing system, babysitting, pre-addressed and stamped envelopes so an older person can easily keep in touch, a family photo or a tax-deductible contribution to a charity.

$ Make a budget. Once you have figured out who you want to buy gifts for, you will do yourself a huge favor by determining your overall budget and having a general idea of how much you want -- and can afford -- to spend for each person. This will help you avoid the temptations and frustrations of last-minute impulse buying.

$ Spend within your allotment. A spending plan has no purpose if you do not stick to it. This takes tremendous discipline, and you may want to enlist help. Shopping with someone who can provide the voice of reason is the best way to keep from overspending.

$ Get started early. Good deals are often available before the official holiday shopping season starts on the day after Thanksgiving. Prices are usually lower, you have more time to take advantage of mail order bargains and you can find some great deals on models that are being phased out toward the end of the year.

$ Look for good gifts that are also good buys. Learn about the features and options available on a particular product, especially expensive items such as cameras, video equipment, sporting goods, stereos and computers. Get specific product numbers before you shop around so you are not comparing apples to oranges. Read up on different makes and models so you will not be influenced by the more costly recommendations of high-pressure salespeople.

$ Once you’ve narrowed the field, look for bargains. Studies have shown major price variations -- often 50% or more -- in the same area for identical products, especially audio-video and computer equipment. Do not assume that prices are always lower in catalogs or on television shopping channels, no matter what their ads claim.

$ Know the store’s return policies before you buy. If what you thought was a perfect gift for someone special and it turns out to be a duplicate or does not fit (her body or her tastes), you will want the store to allow for the item to be returned for a refund, credit or exchange. Most returns during this time are flexible because of the gift giving season. Most return policies are on receipts or posted. Ask for gift receipts if you are mailing gifts. You will need to hold onto the receipt in case you want to return the gift.

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$ Avoid buying unnecessary warranties. Many consumer products come with warranties, especially audio-video equipment and appliances. It may be worth the price to buy a more expensive model if it comes with an excellent performance guarantee. Resist the pressure to buy an extended warranty or service contract, usually offered on electronics and appliances. They often duplicate the product's existing warranty and rarely are worth the extra cost.

$ Keep records of all your purchases. To make sure you stay on track and will not be surprised by gigantic credit card bills after the New Year, keep all sales receipts. Receipts will also come in handy when monitoring your credit card statements. Use an empty check register to assist in tracking your expenditures.

$ Remember other obligations. Pay all your bills on time. Keep in mind that utilities could fluctuate and that some companies will allow you to forego making payment for December or January, turn these offers down. Pay ALL your bills.

Shopping for gifts can be a real dilemma or very stressful. What do you purchase for that finicky teen, a co-worker or a babysitter? Gift cards may be the answer.

Before you buy a stack of gift cards, know the different types of gift cards and tips for buying and using them

$ retail gift cards are sold by merchants
$ bank gift cards carry the logo of a payment card network like American Express, Discover, Mastercard or Visa, and can be used wherever the brand is accepted

Remember new rules went into effect August 22, 2010 (refer to October Money 2020).

Tips for Buying

$ Buy from sources you know and trust. Avoid buying gift cards from online auction sites because cards may be counterfeit or may have been obtained fraudulently.
$ Read the fine print before you buy. Is there a fee to buy the card?
$ Check to see whether any fees will be deducted from the card after you purchase it.
$ Inspect the card before you buy it.
  *Verify protective stickers are in place
  *Codes have protective covering and not scratched off
  *Report damages to stores selling cards
$ Give recipient original receipt to verify purchase

Tips for Using Gift Cards

$ When you receive card, read terms and conditions. Check for an expiration date or fees
$ If it appears value of the card has expired, or fees have been deducted, contact the company. They may still honor or reverse fees.
$ Use your card as soon as you can. It’s not unusual to misplace gift cards or forget you have them; using them early will help you get the full value.
$ Treat the card like cash. If your card is lost or stolen, report it to the issuer immediately. Most issuers have toll-free numbers you can call to report a lost or stolen card.

Problems or Complaints?

$ For cards issued by National banks, contact the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC) Customer Assistance group - 800-613-6743 or send email to : customer.assistance@occ.treas.gov. The OCC Charters, regulates, and supervises national banks.

Gift Idea - One for the Whole Family

Think outside the gift box. Give a single gift to an entire family - family night basket with a game, a couple of DVDs, popcorn and air popper.
Recycle: Use items around house to package gifts.

Prerecorded phone sales are banned unless a consumer gives written permission to the company making them. Firms that violate the ban may be fined as much as $16,000 per call. What to do: If you get an unauthorized robocall, report the name of the company and the phone number to the Federal Trade Commission (877-FTC-HELP, www.ftc.gov). Robocalls still are allowed from debt collectors, political and charitable organizations, and firms doing surveys and providing information, such as flight cancellations and delivery notices.

Shop when you are in the right frame of mind. Tis the season to give and not buy 2 for me - 1 for you.

Six phone numbers to carry on paper when traveling so that you have them even if your cell phone battery is dead:

- Your airline’s toll-free reservation number
- Your travel agent’s number
- If traveling on business, the direct number of the person who handles your company’s travel
- Help line of your credit card issuer
- Toll-free number of your connecting airline
- Number of the taxi, limousine, shuttle or car service that is supposed to meet you at the airport.

Things never to buy used: Cribs, children’s furniture, car seats and children’s bicycle helmets may not meet today’s safety standards and/or may have been recalled. Used tires can be unstable and unreliable. Mattresses could be infested with bugs, mold, mites and bacteria, as could swimsuits, undergarments, shoes, hats and makeup. Used pet supplies are likely to have stains and odors.

Reality Store - Watson Learning Center

Volunteer Volunteer

Would you like to be trained and share financial programs in the community??

Become a Building Dollar$ and Sen$e Volunteer!

Details on training dates and commitment to come or contact Marian Ross at (817) 884-1294 or m-ross@tamu.edu.

If you would like for Reality Store to come to your school, contact Marian Ross for requirements at (817)884-1294.
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