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November 2023  
A Special Supplement to

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# The benefits of shopping local during the holiday season

Millions of people enjoy shopping for gifts and loved ones each holiday season. The spirit of giving is alive and well each December, and that can extend to giving back to one's own community.

In addition to supporting local charities when making donations during the holiday season, shoppers can patronize small local businesses over big box retailers and national chains. The decision to do so can benefit communities in myriad ways.

Small businesses inspire young entrepreneurs. The United States Department of Commerce reports that nearly half of all small business owners in the U.S. in 2018 were 54 or younger. Six percent of those owners were 34 and under. Young entrepreneurs at the helm of thriving local businesses provide inspiration to the next genera-



tion of innovators.

Thriving small business owners can send a positive message to traditionally underrepresented groups. The National Women's Business Council Annual Report for 2022 in-

cluded women-owned employer firms increased by nearly 17 percent between 2012 and 2019. Similarly, the U.S. Census Bureau's 2021 Annual Business Survey found that there were more Hispan-

ic-owned and minority-owned businesses in various sectors than a decade earlier. The success of women- and minority-owned businesses sends a positive See SHOP LOCAL on Page 9

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# How to master shopping early for the holidays

“The early bird gets the worm” is a well-known English proverb that historians trace all the way back to the 1600s. Though the words might first have been popularized hundreds of years ago, they remain as true today as they were then, particularly in regard to holiday shopping.

Savvy shoppers have long touted the importance of starting early when looking for holiday gifts for loved ones. Seasoned procrastinators may never embrace early shopping, but others who want to a less hectic holiday shopping season can consider these tips.

- **Begin with a plan.** Holiday shopping excursions, whether they take place in town, at the mall or online, can take longer than expected when shoppers have no idea what they’re looking for. Prior to your first holiday shopping trip, jot down gift ideas for each person on your list. Then scour stores or websites for those items. Starting early affords shoppers time to bargain hunt and ensures supply shortages or other issues won’t get in the way of a happy loved one come the holiday season.

- **Recognize the notion of “early” has changed.** Early holiday



shopping used to be synonymous with the retail holiday Black Friday, which occurs the day after Thanksgiving in the United States. However, many holiday shoppers now begin buying gifts long before they’ve purchased a Thanksgiving turkey. In its 2022 Consumer Pulse Survey, McKinsey & Company found that 56 percent of consumers started their holiday shopping in October. A host of variables may have influenced that shift, but supply chain issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic have lingered, which undoubtedly compelled consumers to get an especially early start on holiday shopping. Shoppers who want to ensure everything arrives on time for the holiday season must recognize that “early” shopping now involves beginning around Halloween, if not earlier.

- **Take the (local) road less traveled.** Shopping local merchants in person is a strategy savvy shoppers have long since embraced, but it’s one that’s especially beneficial in an era

marked by supply chain issues and inflation. Local merchants don’t have the overhead or sizable staffs of big box or chain stores, which enables them to keep costs low. And since local merchants produce many of their own products, it’s likely there’s something in store that shoppers will love and less likely that they will have issues filling orders. A late fall afternoon in a local shopping district can yield an array of treasures and help holiday shoppers find the right gift for many a person on their list.

- **When in doubt, go gift card.** If the right gift is proving elusive even when shopping early, shoppers should not hesitate to go the gift card route. Shoppers need not feel as though a gift card is a nonstarter, as a 2022 survey from the National Retail Federation found that 54 percent of survey respondents indicated gift cards were the most desirable gift of the holiday season.

Shopping early is a great way to enjoy a less hectic holiday season.



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# Black Friday shopping tips

Retail holidays now dot the consumer landscape throughout much of the year. That shift has made a day like Black Friday somewhat less unique than it was in years past. However, Black Friday remains the unofficial kickoff to the holiday shopping season, and it's still a major day for retailers big and small.

According to Adobe Analytics, in 2022 consumers spent \$9.12 billion while online shopping on Black Friday. A separate report from the National Retail Federation and Prosper Insights & Analytics indicated just under 200 million consumers shopped online and in store between Thanksgiving Day and Cyber Monday, which is the Monday following Black Friday. Such figures indicate that holiday shopping on the weekend of Thanksgiving might have changed, but it's still wildly popular. This Black Friday, shoppers can consider these tips to ensure they find the right gifts at the right price.

• Do some research before the big day. The spirit of competition is alive and well on Black Friday. Consumers once flocked en masse to store parking lots in the wee hours of the morning in order to get sale items before shelves emptied. Some still do, so shoppers may need to be willing to compete to find the best deals. But some pre-Black Friday research might prove the best way to land the best deals, and it may



not require waking up in the middle of the night. Much like shoppers compete with one another to grab sale items, retailers also compete to get shoppers in store or on their websites. As a result, it's not uncommon for retailers big and small to advertise Black Friday sales weeks in advance. Shoppers can research these sales and plan when to visit certain stores in order to land the best deal.

• Wake up early. Shoppers may not need to get out of bed at 3 a.m. to land the best Black Friday deals, but the early bird still gets the worm on the day after Thanksgiving. Plan to shop early in the morning, which increases the chances of finding the right gift at the right price. If an item you've earmarked is part of a doorbuster deal, plan to get to the store or onto the website as early as possi-

ble.

• Establish a budget. It's easy to go overboard when shopping

deals on Black Friday. However, busting the budget on the first day of the holiday shopping season sets a bad precedent for the weeks to come. A holiday debt survey from LendingTree found that 35 percent of shoppers took on debt to pay for their holiday purchases in 2022, with the average consumer accumulating more than \$1,500 in debt. Savvy shoppers devise a budget prior to shopping and stick to that budget.

Black Friday remains a wildly popular retail holiday. A little research, a willingness to get up early and some determination to stay on budget is a formula for a successful Black Friday.

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# Christmas stocking decorating tips and tricks

Hanging Christmas stockings is just one of the many traditions that fill the days leading up to Christmas. One theory regarding the origins of stockings says the tradition began when a poor widower who had three daughters worried over having enough money for their wedding dowries to help secure the daughters' futures. The women, who had hung their stockings by the fireplace to dry, woke up to find solid gold spheres inside. This legend suggests kindly St. Nicholas visited the home in the night and left the presents, helping ensure the daughters could marry well, after all.

Christmas stockings were the first places

where gifts were stowed, before under the boughs of Christmas trees became the primary spot for placing gifts. Then stockings were secondary vessels reserved for small trinkets. Today stockings are largely Christmas decorations rather than places to place gifts. Still, they're a key component of holiday magic.

When including stockings in holiday festivities, follow these tips for whimsy and more.

· Utilize stocking holders. Stocking holders are either metal or wooden devices that are placed on mantels. Hooks on the holders suspend the stockings. Just be sure the holders are sturdy enough to handle the

weight of a stuffed stocking if you plan on filling it with goodies.

· Determine your style. There are Christmas stockings that coordinate to just about any interior design style. From farmhouse to modern to traditional, choose one that fits with your aesthetic. That isn't to say you can't mix and match stockings if you prefer a more eclectic, homespun feel.

· Enhance your stocking look. If stockings are strictly decorative, enhance their look with a few tricks. First, use tissue paper or balled up shopping bags to stuff the stockings and give them shape. Fill a small baggie with sand or florist glass and place in

the heel of the stocking to balance it out and prevent the stocking from blowing around in the breeze.

· No fireplace; no problem. Stockings are traditionally hung from the fireplace mantel, but if you don't have a fireplace there is no need to fret. Simply use ribbons to hang them from the bannister of a staircase, or hang stockings right on walls with removable hooks, or from sturdy shelves. You also can think creatively and hang larger stockings on a door like you might a wreath.

Whether they're decorative or functional, stockings can be an integral component of holiday decor in a home.





# How businesses can make the most of Small Business Saturday

Sales and consumer holidays compete for shoppers' attentions every year between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. Such events save consumers billions of dollars every year, but small business owners know it's no small feat getting holiday shoppers to part with their hard-earned money.

Competing for holiday shoppers is hard work, but those efforts can provide a big payoff. According to Finder's Black Friday Statistics 2022, 55 percent of men and 52 percent

of women planned to shop Black Friday sales in 2022, when men planned to spend \$465 and women intended to spend \$300. If small business owners are concerned they can't compete on Black Friday, they can always look to Small Business Saturday, which encourages holiday shoppers to patronize brick and mortar businesses that are small and local. Competition can still be steep on Small Business Saturday, but the following are some strategies business owners can employ to

make the most of this unique event on the holiday season calendar.

- Update your website. The Small Business Administration recommends that small business owners consider a digital makeover for their websites. Even though Small Business Saturday encourages individuals to shop in person, modern consumers typically peruse online offerings first. Updating an outdated website or simply reviewing all information, including product details, on the website

to ensure it's up-to-date can help small businesses make a strong first impression with holiday shoppers.

- Promote Small Business Saturday. Though it's been around for more than a decade, Small Business Saturday is not yet the household name that Black Friday has become. Small business owners can drum up interest in Small Business Saturday by promoting the day on their social media channels.

See **SMALL BUSINESS** on Page 9

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## SMALL BUSINESS

Continued from page 8

The SBA recommends business owners encourage shoppers to snap selfies and tag their businesses on their own social media accounts, which can increase engagement and potentially attract new customers.

Sell and promote gift cards. Gift cards help national retailers generate substantial revenue each year, and there's no reason why small businesses can't get their piece of the gift card pie. Gift cards remain wildly popular, as a recent survey from the National Retail Federation found that 54 percent of participants identified gift cards as the most-wanted gift of

the 2022 holiday season. Small businesses can offer discounted gift cards on Small Business Saturday and promote those efforts on their websites and via social media.

Open early and close late. Small Business Saturday, which occurs on the Saturday after Thanksgiving, is a great opportunity for small businesses to start the potentially lucrative holiday season off on the right foot. The SBA urges small businesses to open early and close late on Small Business Saturday so they can capitalize as much as possible on this popular retail holiday.

Small business owners can embrace various strategies to make the most of Small Business Saturday.

## SHOP LOCAL

Continued from page 3

message to young entrepreneurs and locals who are part of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in business. That can help to create a more diverse and inclusive Main Street, the success of which depends heavily on locals' willingness to patronize locally-owned businesses.

Shopping local supports many small business owners. Family meals and social gatherings with friends and coworkers are a big part of the holiday season, and it's not uncommon to break bread and share a few drinks during a night on the town. Choosing to gather at a locally owned restaurant or tavern in-

stead of a chain restaurant can have a ripple effect on an assortment of local businesses. Local restaurants often source their ingredients from local farms. A family meal at such a restaurant benefits both the restaurant owner and the hard-working local suppliers of the food that ends up on the plate. Local restaurants also are more likely to list locally produced wines and craft beers on their menus than national chains. That adds to the ripple effect of celebrating the holidays at a locally owned restaurant.

A thriving small business sector is vital to a strong local economy. Shoppers can keep that in mind and patronize local businesses during the holiday season.





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# Holiday shopping for those who seemingly have it all

Made-for-TV movies often depict holiday shopping in the best possible light. The story's protagonist wanders into the town center and easily finds everything on his or her list at a series of perfectly decorated local boutiques that have nary a shopper in sight. Hot chocolate or mulled cider and repartee also tends to be par for the television movie course.

People in the real world understand that holiday shopping doesn't always work so smoothly. Certainly shopping local is a great way to avoid the crowds and introduce shoppers to more unique gift op-



tions, but it's impossible to remove every obstacle in holiday shopping - particularly getting stumped over shopping for that particularly difficult person on your list. The holly jolly nature of the season can be eclipsed when a per-

son doesn't know where to begin when shopping for those people who seem to have it all.

The following ideas can help shoppers who are stuck on what to buy for that loved one who already has it all.

- Consider experiences. A recent Harris Group study found 72 percent of millennials prefer to spend money on experiences rather than things. If the person on your shopping list has just about every material possession one can imagine, giving unique experiences might be the way to go. The National Retail Federation confirms the shift in attitude, noting consumers across all age groups now spend more on experiences than they did in years past.

- Consolidate memories. Technology continues to evolve, which means that the way music, videos and photos are captured and stored is always changing. Unless a person has older gear, it's no longer possible to watch a VHS tape featuring a family member's grad-

uation ceremony or reprint photographs that are on film negatives. However, shoppers can work with a company that will transfer media onto a new format, such as a thumb drive or in a cloud-based account. This can be a heartfelt gift for someone who wants to reminisce.

- Food or beverage subscription. Everyone needs to eat (and drink), so there is always a need for tasty offerings. Introduce loved ones to new foods with various subscriptions. If a person is missing flavors from a home country, have delicacies shipped so the recipient can enjoy a taste of their childhood.

- Make a family cookbook. Enlist the help of other family members and compile beloved family recipes. Utilize a cookbook publishing service to compile all of these recipes together. Then gift recipients can revisit their favorites time and again.

- Trace family lineage. If the gift recipient is a history buff or is interested in his or her family tree, then a membership to an ancestry service could be an ideal gift. Individuals can spend hours uncovering distant relations and studying their family history in the process.

Holiday shopping can be challenging when looking for gifts for people who seemingly have it all. A few outside-the-box ideas can make it easier to overcome that challenge.

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# Age-based guidelines for buying toys and gifts

The holiday season involves making holiday gift lists and checking them twice, or even more frequently to ensure that gift-givers find the best fit for recipients. While age may only be a number in certain instances, when it comes to gifting, age should be a consideration - particularly when kids are involved.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that an estimated 86,000 children treated for toy-related injuries each year are younger than five. Toy-related injuries are preventable, and prevention often comes down to choosing age-appropriate toys for kids.

Toys can be choking hazards when small toys or those with small pieces are given to children who are too young to use them safely. Kids are curious and of-

ten put items in their mouths. Choking is the fourth-leading cause of unintentional death in children under age five, indicates The Emergency Center. Falls, eye injuries, drowning, and motor accidents are leading causes of gift-related injuries. Here's how to select age-appropriate gifts.

- Read the packaging carefully. Most toys and other children's products will come with an age range recommendation. While some kids may be mature beyond their years, it's best to choose gifts that fall within the recommended range. This is particularly the case for infants, toddlers and any child under the age of five.

- Avoid fad gifts. Children often want the latest and greatest gadgets and toys for gifts even if they are not the smartest

choices for their ages. Resist the urge to buy something just to be the "cool parent or grandparent," especially if it isn't age-appropriate. Mermaid tails became popular in recent years, and likely will see increased presence thanks to the home-viewing release of a popular live-action mermaid movie. However, they limit movement and can make swimming more difficult, potentially increasing risk of drowning.

- Provide safety gear. As children age, they may be more interested in gifts that appeal to hobbies and abilities. Scooters, bicycles, skates, and other items are popular among older children. These gifts should only be purchased for those with proven ability, and even then, accompanied with the appropriate safety

gear. This can include helmets, knee pads and eye protection.

- Consider waiting before gifting certain electronics. Although children may be able to use devices safely, there are many who advocate for waiting to give young children smartphones and tablets due to the consequences of excessive screen time. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry says children ages two to five should limit non-educational screen time to about one hour per weekday and three hours on weekend days. Children should be encouraged to pursue healthy habits that limit use of screens, so gift-givers can look for gifts that help to this end.

Age-appropriate gifts ensure safety for the youngest people on holiday gift lists.



# Great gifts for the family foodie

Food features prominently throughout the holiday season. Family meals around the holiday dinner table are a cherished tradition in millions of households, and food also plays a central role during seasonal gatherings with friends and colleagues. Food also can feature prominently throughout Chanukah and on Christmas Day, particularly if a loved one qualifies as a full-fledged foodie.

Many families feature at least one foodie. Foodies always know the best place in town to grab a bite or when a trendy new restaurant will open its doors. But such individuals also enjoy making meals at home, and the following gift ideas can make this holiday season more flavorful for the family foodie.

• **Tabletop firepit:** Shoppers who want to impress their food-loving loved one with something truly unique can give a tabletop firepit. Safe for indoor use, tabletop firepits enable s'mores-loving foodies to indulge in a traditionally summertime favorite all-year-round. Tabletop firepits are small enough to be stored on a kitchen countertop or in a cabinet. When in use, the s'mores-friendly accessory is smokeless, removing perhaps the lone disadvantage to making this beloved treat.

• **Club subscription:** Monthly subscriptions

are a gift that can keep on giving all the way until next holiday season. Sweets lovers will undoubtedly appreciate receiving a box of fresh chocolates each month, while those with more unique tastes may anxiously await the day their monthly shipment of pickles arrives at their doorstep. The options are endless, ensuring there's a monthly subscription out there to tickle every foodie's fancy.

• **Sauce sampler:** Amateur sauciers may find inspiration in a sauce sampler set. Sampler set options abound, so shoppers can find something for foodies who love a spicy sauce, something more sweet or even in between. Of course, sampler sets also provide a range of sauces, making them ideal for foodies who want something spicy tonight before pivoting to a sweeter dish tomorrow. Flavored olive oil sampler sets also can be a great gift for cooks who love to experiment with new flavors.

• **Charcuterie board and knife set:** Foodies who love to host their fellow food fanatics will no doubt fall in love with a new charcuterie board and knife set. A 2023 report from Kroger revealed that the supermarket chain expected charcuterie boards to remain popular over the course of the year. That popularity makes sense, as anything from



meat to cheese to fruit to crackers has a home on a charcuterie board, making the item especially appealing to foodies who routinely share their homes and love of food with friends and family.

• **Espresso maker:** Of course, foodies aren't just about food. Beverages also figure promi-

nently in many foodies' lives. A high-end espresso maker can ground fresh beans and brew multiple cups in no time at all, making it an ideal addition to any foodie's culinary arsenal.

Food is a vital component of the holiday season and can even be incorporated into holiday shopping.

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## Hosting the holidays when times are hectic

Who wouldn't love the holiday season to unfold similarly to the plot of a made-for-TV movie? In such films, families get along, townsfolk are overcome with the holiday spirit and even minor obstacles all get worked out by the time the credits roll. Hosting the holidays in the real world doesn't always go so smoothly.

The period between Thanksgiving and New Years Day can be hectic, as social schedules fill up and work demands mount before people take an end-of-year break. Food may not turn out perfectly and gifts may be purchased in the eleventh hour. In fact, most people's holiday celebrations may be more "Clark Griswold" than "Norman Rockwell." However, a few tips can help any host handle a hectic holiday season.

### Set the date early

Give guests plenty of time to plan for your event. If it is a holiday

social gathering that does not take place on the holiday itself, provide at least three weeks' notice so guests can plan accordingly. This also allows you plenty of time to work backward from that date to ensure all details are accounted for.

### Keep it simple

Instead of a four-course dinner with gourmet fare, consider something small and easy. A gathering that's not geared around trying to impress can ensure hosts have time to kick back and relax with their guests - something everyone can use during this busy time of year. Choose a theme, like hot cocoa and cookies or cocktails and charcuterie, so you won't have as many tasks to tackle. Asking everyone to bring a dish also reduces hosts' workload.

### Space out cleaning

Rather than a mad dash to the finish line the day of the event, space out getting the home in

See **HOST** on Page 15



# Gift ideas for college students



College is the natural next step for many graduating high school students. According to Best Colleges, in 2022 there were 17.9 million students enrolled in degree-granting colleges and universities in the United States. Many other students began their college careers in the fall 2023 semester, joining the ranks of people working toward their degrees.

Holiday gifts that aim to meet the needs and interests of recipients can ensure presents will be enjoyed and utilized. Modern college students likely can use a few things to simplify life on campus.

## Laptop or tablet

Gone are the days when students primarily utilize pen and paper for school assignments. Students are often introduced to tablets and other digital devices to complete assignments and take notes as early as elementary school. This reliance on paperless communication continues at the high school and university level. Most, if not all, assignments are posted online

and then completed and submitted through various portals or cloud services. Therefore, college students will require a laptop or high functioning tablet with the right processing speed and memory capacity to handle the demand.

## Student card funds

Colleges utilize different programs for paying for meal plans and incidentals purchased on campus. This likely involves funds linked to a proprietary card that functions similarly to a debit or credit card. Savvy gift givers can deposit funds into students' accounts so that they'll have a little extra spending money to put toward books or that mocha latte at the campus coffee shop.

## Parking pass

Although freshmen may be restricted from bringing cars to campus unless they are commuter students, sophomores and upperclassmen may be able to park in campus lots. Parking typically is an extra cost for students, meaning friends or relatives can gift the cost of annual parking

passes to the college students in their lives.

## Dorm gear

College students who opt to live in campus housing often want to make their dorm rooms a home away from home. They will need to outfit these tight quarters with items that won't take up too much space. Small pod-type coffee pots, compact microwaves, mini fridges, under-bed storage shelving, area rugs, cozy comforters, and bathroom essentials can make college kids' dorm rooms feel more like home.

## Event tickets

Not every moment should be spent in classrooms or residence halls. College students may want to venture away from campus, and

what better way to enjoy the sights and offerings of what nearby venues have to offer than by attending various events? Gift-givers can offer tickets to art shows, music festivals, comedy club nights, amusement parks, or other events in college towns.

## Travel assistance

Attending college far from home means that students will take planes, trains or automobiles to return home for holidays and other special events. Gifting college students airline or train fare, or providing gift cards for gas station fill-ups, means students will be able to afford trips home when needed.

College students can benefit from gifts geared to the college lifestyle.

## HOST

Continued from page 14

order the entire week prior to the party. Focus on the rooms that will get the most attention, such as living areas, bathrooms and kitchens.

## Prepare overnight spaces

If guests will be spending one or more nights, decide where they will sleep. Choose a private spot away from the hustle of the household, such as a den, home office space or even a finished basement. Create a welcome basket that includes some creature comforts and necessities,

such as extra toiletries, a book, note with Wi-Fi password, and some individually wrapped chocolates.

## Set aside a quiet retreat

Sometimes you may need to sneak away for a moment to take a breather from the action. Delegate a private

space where you can retreat for a few minutes to catch your breath and do some relaxation exercises. Then you may return refreshed and ready to interact with guests once again.

Some simple strategies can help hosts navigate the often hectic holiday season.



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