

Shopping: online vs brick and mortar stores



Online retailing started small; in 1995 Amazon. com launched its shopping website and a year later EBay opened their e-retail doors to consumers, thus changing the way consumers would make purchases. Consumers are faced with similar shopping challenges, they have the hard to shop for friend or family member that results in a cash gift, or they find that perfect shirt, in a color they love, but the store is out of stock on their size, so they either settle on a color that they like in their size or they join the 167 million others in 2012 by shopping online.

It is predicted that in 2016 E-retail spending will increase by 62% over the amount spent in 2012. Online shopping offers many benefits over their brick and mortar counterparts, including access to thousands of stores, easy price comparisons, and the ability to shop from home. Online shopping provides thousands of stores right at the consumer's finger tips. Traditional stores often stock three colors of a shirt in each size, whereas an online retailer could provide an extensive selection of sizes and colors of the style shirt offered in the traditional stores.

Keeping with the online shopping era, traditional stores like Macy's, Sears and Walmart have set up websites that offer more inventory than they can display in their retail floor space. These retailers also offer " Online only" merchandise, and sale prices. Online shopping has provided people that do not live in large cities with shopping malls, the ability to shop those stores without making a day trip to the city. With online retailers like Amazon. com, Ebay. com and Shopzilla. com it is possible to shop thousands of retailers on one website, even stores in other countries.

Another advantage to online shopping is the ease of finding the best possible deal available on a purchase. If a consumer were looking to purchase the new Apple iPad mini 16GB, they would find it available at many retailers, Walmart. com offered the iPad for \$329. 00, while BestBuy. com offered it for \$329. 99, and Amazon. com offered the same version for \$384. 99. All three retailers offered free shipping with this purchase, and in this case Walmart. com offered the best deal for this hot new item.

The Internet has created the possibility of comparing items at stores like Walmart, Target, Sears, BestBuy and Amazon with one simple search on their computer. Online retailers are able to offer lower prices than their brick and mortar competition since they have lower operating and overhead costs, this creates the ability to offer lower prices to consumers daily. If a consumer is just browsing for a purchase, most e-retailers offer the ability to save a search or even create a wish list to purchase from later.

Gift registries for weddings and baby showers also can be created online, and offer guests that cannot attend in person the ability to send a gift directly from the registry. Online coupon codes and web sales are another way that consumers can take advantage of lower shopping prices. During the busy holiday season, many e-retailers offer Cyber Monday sales, which is the online version of brick and mortar stores Black Friday. During Cyber Monday they offer similar rock bottom sale prices on a select number of items as their traditional counterparts offer on Black Friday.

Many online retailers offer free shipping with a minimum total purchase, and other retailers like Walmart. com offer free “ site to store” shipping, where the consumer goes to their local brick and mortar store to pick up their

purchase. When a consumer needs to have their purchase faster than the typical free shipping of five to seven days, they can opt to pay for faster service like next day delivery or overnight service. Orders placed online come with easy return policies, and many e-retailers include return address labels with orders to provide the consumer with a simple way to return items ordered.

When a consumer is unhappy with a product on Amazon. com, returns or exchanges are easy to complete, since Amazon. com has many retailers available on their website, they back all sales completed on their website. In cases where the individual seller will not correct a consumer's problem, Amazon will step in and provide the customer service to the consumer when attempts to solve the problem with the individual sellers fail. Online shopping's most appealing benefit is the ability to shop at any time of day or night from the comfort of the consumer's personal computer.

Most traditional retailers are not able to offer this type of shopping experience, and those like 24-hour Walmart stores, provide additional hassles like new stock cluttering the aisles in the overnight hours as employees work to put the items on the shelves and a lowered number of available checkout lines. Consumers with busy schedules are able to shop online allowing them the opportunity to stay on schedule in their day. Shopping online has provided consumers the ability to shop any time of the day, wearing pajamas, and watching television.

Parents with young children take advantage of online shopping because there is no need to hire a babysitter as the consumers children can be napping or completing their homework in the next room. Online shopping

has provided elderly shoppers the opportunity to complete their shopping without becoming tired from traveling from store to store. E-Retailing also provides people who might be disabled or handicapped a way to complete shopping without relying on someone for a ride. With the growing concern for the environment, shopping online is a way to reduce pollution caused by vehicles driving to traditional stores.

The next time you have some shopping to complete, for yourself or a friend, the Internet is a tremendous place to complete the purchase. With one simple search the products will be lined up in order of price lowest to high, the selection will be larger than in a traditional store, and when necessary returns are simple to complete. Traditional stores will remain a way of life for many purchases, but in the hours that they are closed, consumers can continue to make purchases from a wide selection of inventory.