



The shrink's guide to shopping

With sales on and money tight, psychologist Dr Nicola Davies shares her shopping strategies

When is a bargain not a bargain? 'When you're buying it just because it's on sale and not because it's something you really want or need,' says consumer research psychologist Kit Yarrow. 'In these tougher economic times, shoppers have become very bargain conscious, sometimes to the point where they focus more on what they're saving than on what they're spending.' It may sound obvious, but before you pay for

your item, ask yourself whether you'd want it if wasn't on sale; if the answer is 'no', walk away. 'If you're not sure, wait for 20 minutes, the amount of time it takes for your body's nervous system to get back to normal after it's been fired up by seeing something you like, which interferes with rational thinking,' advises Yarrow. According to Martin Lindstrom, author of *Buyology: How Everything We Believe about Why We Buy is Wrong* (Random House Business, £8.99), because we make a massive 90 per cent of our purchases without careful consideration, even when we're thinking rationally, getting caught up in sales hype makes us even more likely to impulse buy. Put your 'maybe' items on hold and go for a coffee or a walk before making a decision.

for the New Year sale say it all. Once the doors open and the screams have died down, the pressure is on as they frantically rummage through piles of discounted goods to find what they're looking for. 'Sales are a considerable source of stress for many shoppers,' confirms Dr David Lewis-Hodgson, director of research at Mindlab International, a company that specialises in studying consumer behaviour. 'There are three main reasons for this – one, being in a large crowd of people causes a rise in heart rate and blood pressure; two, wondering whether the bargain you have set your heart on will be snapped up by another shopper prompts psychological uncertainty; and three, sales place physical demands on your stamina, especially if you've had to get up early or spent hours queuing.' This stress can increase in victims of 'spenvy' – the term given to the discomfort we feel when we think that friends and family are grabbing better bargains than we are. To avoid

How to... GRAB A BARGAIN

- **Look at the price you're paying,** not the percentage saved.
- **Consider whether** the purchase will actually be used or enjoyed.
- **Buy presents for the coming year,** including Christmas, birthdays, Mother's Day, Father's Day and any other occasion you can think of.

Avoid 'spenvy'

The panicked looks on the faces of those bargain-hunters streaming into Harrods after queuing for days outside the store

expensive mistakes, focus on what you're purchasing instead of worrying about what others are buying.

Don't be colour blind

Still wondering what possessed you to splash out on that shocking-pink cashmere jumper in last year's sales, which is still sitting unworn in your wardrobe? Colours hugely influence how we feel and what we buy – The Institute for Color Research in the United States revealed that between 62 per cent and 90 per cent of our judgement about a purchase is based on colour alone. Savvy shop owners use this to their advantage, so in the January sales, you'll see plenty of vibrant colours that make you feel positive and keep you in the festive spirit, leaving you vulnerable to 'binge buying'. This year, don't be fooled by the displays and only choose garments in shades that suit you and match your existing wardrobe.

Plan ahead

The most valuable piece of advice for surviving the sales and grabbing bargains is to go prepared. To avoid 'what was I thinking?' moments, business mentor Dinah Liversidge never goes sales shopping without a strategy. 'I'd advise sales shoppers to make a list before they go so that they don't buy things they don't need, bring along photos of items that purchases need to go with, and set and stick to a budget.'



Save-money tips

- ❑ **TAKE YOUR PARTNER WITH YOU** Research shows that men and women can shop together for approximately 70 minutes before having an argument. Leaving after an hour will not only help you avoid bickering, it will also force you to limit your time in the sales.
- ❑ **TAKE CASH** Handing over cash stimulates regions in the brain associated with discomfort which plastic doesn't affect. 'Credit cards put a buffer between you and your money, but paying in cash makes you think first and spend less as a result,' explains Yarrow.
- ❑ **DRESS FOR EASE** Dress so that you can try clothes on in the shop rather than queuing for the changing rooms. This way, you're less likely to walk away with something that doesn't fit or suit you.

Your sales survival kit

- **A friend or family member** to stand in queues, provide opinions, hold bags while you go to the loo and keep you sane.
- **Pen and paper** to note down possible purchases and their location.
- **Camera** to help you select matching clothes, household items, etc.
- **Comfortable shoes** to cushion your tired feet.
- **Water** to keep you hydrated. Traipsing around crowded shops is thirsty work and, as Yarrow explains, 'when we're thirsty we crave water but it's easy to mistake dehydration for thirst for a purchase.'

Look what I did!

'I completed a degree aged 93!'

Edna Douce, 93, from Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands proved that age is no barrier, when she obtained a degree in her tenth decade...

As I walked onto the stage to receive my degree certificate, the claps and cheers were deafening. Completing a degree is an achievement for anyone, but the applause for me was a little more enthusiastic because I was 93!

It all began when I lost my husband Lesley after 37 happy years of marriage. We were very close and loved travelling, playing bridge and socialising, so I felt lost without him and worried how I was going to fill the void.

I decided the solution was to set myself a fresh challenge. I'd always wanted to do a degree and English is a big passion. But I knew it wasn't going to be easy. The last time I studied was 40 years ago, in 1961, when I qualified as a teacher.

When I told my family and friends I was embarking on an English literature and humanities degree, they were very supportive, although some thought it was a rather large challenge to take on at the age of 89!

I opted for an Open University degree, which involved a lot of home study, so I had to master computer and internet skills, too. And once a month, I attended lectures. The other students didn't seem particularly surprised, though I suspect they thought I was 70 rather than 90.

At times the course was very tough but I worked my hardest and tried my very best. The day of my graduation will always be one of the proudest moments in my life. I still remember queuing to collect my certificate and being asked if I minded everyone knowing my age. I smiled sheepishly and replied: 'Of course not'.

My degree has opened up so many opportunities; I now belong to the university's Women's Group and Book Club. I'm planning on having a gap year but hope to study a Masters in English in 2013. I often think of Les and what he would say if he was still here now. I'm pretty sure he would have been eagerly clapping and applauding my achievement too.'



Edna with her late husband, Les