

Smart shopping makes 'cents'

The post-holiday sales are in full swing, and I'll admit I do love a great bargain!

But bargain hunting is more than looking for the lowest price; it's about getting the best deal. As consumers we make choices all the time about how to spend our money. Not only do we want good bargains, but we also want to spend our money in ways that support our own values.

Buying fewer items that are made of better materials, use less energy and last longer will save you money in the long run.

The added value: It reduces the number of unnecessary and shoddy products that end up in our landfills.

■ **It's not a great deal if you don't need it.**

Rock-bottom prices can tempt even the savviest shopper to make purchases he/she doesn't need.

There's a rule of thumb I try to keep in mind when I'm drawn to a display of enticing gadgets (usually strategically placed right by the register): It's not a bargain if you don't need it!

Don't worry, there's no need to avoid the clearance rack entirely. There are simple ways to avoid impulse buys.

Shopping lists are a very effective way to resist unnecessary stuff. If an item is not on the list, take a moment to consider whether or not it is essential. If you still feel the urge, put the item aside until you've finished the rest of your shopping.

Even better: Go home and think about it. A little time and space can help clear your head.

■ **A little research never hurts.**

The Internet has revolutionized the way Americans shop. If you need something, you can bet some-



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It's bargain hunting season, but being a smart shopper means looking beyond the sticker price.



one out there has written a review, an article or a blog about getting the best bang for your buck.

■ **Rent or borrow?**

There are so many things we buy but only need once or twice a year. Often, these are big-ticket items, so why put such a large dent in your bank account? Rent or borrow instead. Remember, friends and family can be great resources. If you only use a power drill once in a blue moon, borrowing from Uncle Bob can save you a bundle.

■ **Get the most out of what you do buy.**

An item with the lowest sticker price can actually cost you much more in the long run. Smart shopping means considering the bigger picture, the long-term costs. Most of the time, a slightly higher

AT GLANCE

A sampling of rental businesses in Salinas:

■ **A-Z RENTAL CENTER:**

110 Abbott St., Salinas, 424-4770, A2Zpartyrental.com. A-Z has everything you need to plan a special event: tables, chairs, linens, catering equipment and barbecues.

■ **GADSBY'S MUSIC CO.:**

219 Monterey St, Salinas, 424-6421. Not sure that the Tuba is right for your son or daughter? Gadsby's rents instruments, as well as, amps and P.A.s.

■ **RENT-A-CENTER:** 828 E

Alisal St, Salinas, 753-9000, rentacenter.com. Rent-A-Center offers short- and long-term rental options for video cameras, computers, other electronics, furniture and appliances.

initial investment will pay big dividends. Look for better quality items you know will last. That way you don't end up buying the same things over and over again.

Remember, we pay for the energy to power appliances and other electrical products years after the initial purchase. Make sure you factor these costs into your decision. More often than not, the cost savings from an energy-efficient dishwasher or clothes dryer, for example, will pay back the price difference in a relatively short period of time.

■ **The real deal!**

Putting a little extra thought into our shopping can prevent us from wasting our time and money. Preventing waste now also means it doesn't have to be managed later, saving all of us precious resources like energy and open space. "Reduce" is the first and most important of the 3Rs for a reason — it's the best action you can take to keep trash out of our landfills.

ALAN STYLES is the Recycling Coordinator for the Salinas Valley Solid Waste Authority. His "Recycle News" column appears monthly in the Central Coast Living Section of the Salinas Californian. Contact him at alanst@svswa.org.