



Wardrobe Strategies: Shopping Savvy

Shopping for clothing is a delightful pastime for some individuals. For others it is a dreaded chore. Nearly everyone can identify with at least one shopping anxiety such as over crowded stores, a limited amount of money to spend or not having enough time to shop. Whatever your shopping dilemma, a better understanding of the marketplace is sure to ease tension and create a more pleasant shopping experience.

When to Shop

Begin your shopping experience with a plan. List the items you would like to purchase along with the desired style, color and size. A list will help you focus on your wardrobe needs that can save time and cut down on shopping fatigue. Keep the list up-to-date and handy for reference as you shop.

Plan to shop for clothing when you have an adequate amount of time. Buying on impulse can be costly and ineffective. If the item to be purchased is to match or coordinate with other wardrobe items, take the item(s) to be matched with you.

Sales

The marketplace is full of sales! Some good; some not so good. Know when and how to shop sales to take full advantage of the situation. There are basically three types.



The **Clearance Sale** can yield the best bargains for the dollar. Items can be moderately to drastically reduced in price. These sales take place when a store wishes to move out one season's merchandise to make room for the next season. The biggest clearance

sales occur just after Christmas and in July. Clothing items may be limited in style, color and size. Consumers should check carefully for soiled or damaged garments. Knowing the sales policy is important. Some stores will put items on the clearance rack and continue to reduce the price each week/day until it reaches a certain point. Others view the clearance price as the final markdown.



Annual Sales or semiannual sales are planned when people are buying less. These sales are designed to lure the consumer into the marketplace by reducing the price of selected items. Markdowns are not as drastic as clearance sales, but they can be substantial.

The third type is the **Anniversary Sale**, which can take on many names. The sale could be labeled a "Grand Opening," Birthday, "President's Day" or special holiday sale such as "Labor Day Specials." These reductions are designed to draw the customer into the store to spend money. Again, the price reductions can be substantial, but rarely as much as the clearance sale. True bargains can be had if you are familiar with the merchandise, the store and the shopping environment.

Timing Purchases

Smart clothing shoppers get to know the city or town where they plan to do most of their clothing shopping. Identify when the seasonal peaks occur in your favorite stores and familiarize yourself with the merchandise. This will be the time when selection will be at its best. Decide how early, or late, in a season to shop.



Merchandising trends in recent years have been toward less or limited reordering of seasonal items. Therefore, if you wait to purchase an item, you may find it gone when you return! Timing your clothing purchasing has become a critical shopping issue.

Watch the newspapers and listen to local radio/TV for advertisements about upcoming sales. Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays are frequently big days for newspaper advertisements and coupons. Read advertisements carefully, including the small print!



If you work outside the home, your shopping time may be limited to the busiest times of the day and week. Stores are usually more crowded, and shopping time more hurried. Weekday mornings are the most quiet and relaxing times to shop. Sales personnel are generally better able and willing to help customers during this time. If you are confined to a specific work schedule, or find shopping an ordeal, taking an occasional weekday off from work to shop can be very worthwhile and productive!

Where to Shop

There are several places where clothing can be purchased. The creative shopper will continually be on the look out for various stores, departments and locales which feature clothing items. Let us explore a few!

Store Types

Department stores are one of the first places we usually think about shopping for clothing. These are stores made up of various departments featuring different types of merchandise. Clothing can be divided into several departments such as Juniors, Petite, Women, Better Sportswear, Men's Wear, Campus. The larger the store, the more divisions. The same or similar merchandise may be found in several different departments. If bargain shopping is high on your list, do not forget to investigate unisex garments in several departments. You might just find that long sleeve white shirt to be cheaper in the Young Men's department than in Better Sportswear!

One of the more recent department store services is the Personal Shopper. These are trained personnel who will "assist" you with, or do your shopping for you within the store. These services are usually free, and can be as extensive as putting together a complete seasonal wardrobe to finding just the right belt for a suit. They offer suggestions within your price range and according to your lifestyle and personal taste.



Specialty stores may also be known as boutiques. They offer a more limited variety of merchandise, sometimes only one category, such as men's clothing or sportswear. This store is usually smaller than the department store, and merchandise can range in price.

Variety stores generally feature a scale-down atmosphere including sales personnel. Money can be saved if you are a good shopper and are shopping for wardrobe basics. Get to know your store and its merchandise.

Discount stores can and do vary in many respects. Some discount stores resemble variety stores while others are very similar to department stores. Clothing quality may also vary from first quality to seconds and irregulars.

second - items which are in need of repair, i.e. fabric snag, torn pocket.

irregular - items that may be functional but are not necessarily aesthetically pleasing; e.g. plaids do not match, garment cut off-grain.

Take time to look for defects. You can save a great deal of money if the defect is something you can live with or change with little effort.

Outlet stores have opened all over the country. They are closely related to discount stores in terms of merchandise, services and prices. Outlets can also resemble specialty stores since they may limit their merchandise to specific categories.

Chain stores. Any of the stores listed above can be a chain store. A chain store carries standardized merchandise from city to city. These stores are managed from a central office; therefore, store policies may not be as flexible as locally owned stores.

Second-hand, Like-New, and Vintage stores can be a surprisingly satisfactory place to shop for your clothing needs! Clothing in these stores can be new or nearly new in regard to previous use or wear. Check them out in your locale.



Garage sales usually feature clothing which no longer fits the seller, is in need of repair or is out of fashion. A smart consumer will attempt to find out the reason the clothing is being sold.

Mail order, catalog, and computer online shopping offer at-home convenience. Merchandise quality and price varies greatly. The consumer is at a disadvantage by not being able to see, feel and evaluate the garment first-hand. The consumer shopper must rely heavily on the company's reputation and proven reliability.

Shopping Locale

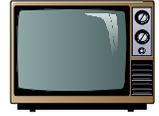
You can find clothing sold almost anywhere you shop these days. Most consumers identify locations to shop based on a variety of needs ranging from a single favorite store to price range of merchandise.

In many cities and towns, downtown shopping is past history. Others are attempting to revitalize the downtown area with tempting shopping incentives. Some retailers continue to operate their original store in the downtown area. This so-called main store may carry a much better selection than the branch stores.



Shopping centers and malls have become the central shopping areas. Their popularity is built around a clustering of stores and businesses to fit the needs of busy customers. Convenience shopping is the key to success.

Home shopping is growing in popularity and has become a way of life for some individuals. This includes mail order and toll free telephone catalog services, television shopping channels and computer shopping via internet. Receiving catalogs in the mail that have not been requested is becoming a common occurrence. Companies purchase mailing lists from a variety of sources. October and November are big months for catalogs in preparation for the holiday season.



Shopping online via the computer opens up a wide world of goods and services from around the globe. With a click of the key you can connect with the international marketplace in a matter of seconds. However, if you become an "e-consumer," do your homework! The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) offers a guide to world wide web shoppers including a checklist of helpful tips. The list can be found on line at www.ftc.gov. Your local county agent may also have some additional information or suggestions.

Home shopping services are convenient, but not without their own set of risks. Know the company with whom you are dealing. Understand the terms, conditions and exact cost of the merchandise. For more detailed information, talk with your local county agent *before* ordering.

Finding a garage sale in most locations is not a difficult task. Read the classified ads, check community bulletin boards at grocery stores, and look for posted signs when driving through residential areas. Weekends are a popular time for these sales.

HOW TO SHOP

According to a national survey taken a few years ago, consumers have greater buying power today than ever before, but many are "ignorant" about how the marketplace operates. Doing your homework is important before you go to the marketplace. Select your shopping locations and determine a shopping strategy or sequence of stores or departments to visit. Have a list of items to purchase, organize your time and energy, and designate an amount of money you can spend.



Sales Personnel--Some Good; Some Not-So-Good!

If you are searching for a special item or need help, *ask!* Keep in mind, however, that some sales personnel are more knowledgeable than others.



Shopping has become more impersonal and informal. Sales persons often lack intensive training and detailed knowledge about the merchandise. Many clerks view selling clothes as a job rather than a vocation.

One way to avoid problems is to develop a good working relationship with a reliable sales person in a store you frequent. A good sales person is interested in the customer, talks intelligently, is practical and knows the merchandise in that department or store. The individual is not pushy, allowing you, the customer, the opportunity to make the purchasing decision. Avoid being pressured into purchasing an item for any reason (sales person, well-meaning friend, time, or potential "bargain")!

When sales persons have been helpful and courteous, show your appreciation. Praise for a job well done goes a long way! Some stores have a system by which sales personnel are rewarded based on comments or recommendations from their consumers. On the spot verbal praise can be a means of establishing a good personal shopping relationship for future encounters. Do take the time to recognize and commend individuals who have done an outstanding job.

Shopping Etiquette

In today's busy informal world, consumers sometimes forget the importance of shopping etiquette. If you have ever been in the marketplace and felt you have been unfairly treated, there may have been a reason for that treatment. When you look and act like a reliable customer, you are more likely to be treated like a "reliable" consumer.

- Dress neatly and be well-groomed.
- Do not carry food or drink into a clothing store and do not smoke.
- Conduct yourself in a courteous manner when talking to sales personnel and other store customers.



- It is your responsibility to become familiar with store policies regarding refunds and exchanges before purchasing. Ask before you purchase.
- If problems occur with a sales clerk, discuss the situation courteously with the store manager.
- Do not demand or expect excessive amounts of time during busy shopping periods.

Shopping Fatigue

"Shop 'till you drop" is a familiar expression, which can also be quite true, if you are not a shopping expert. Fatigue can be avoided by dressing properly and taking frequent breaks. Leave your heavy coat and bulky clothing at home. Wear comfortable shoes and lightweight items that can be layered for comfort whatever the season. Women should make sure their handbags contain only necessary items to eliminate carrying around extra weight. A lightweight shoulder bag can also be kept close to the body as you shop discouraging purse snatching and the occasional pickpocket.

Keep in mind that you will be trying on garments. Plan your shopping outfit accordingly so that undressing and dressing will take a minimum amount of time and energy. Think ahead and wear, or take with you, any special undergarments that would be required for the garment you plan to purchase. Take along a lightweight washable scarf or a zip-up make-up protector to protect your hair and make-up.



Eat a reasonable, but never heavy, meal before a shopping trip. You may also want to plan a stop for a light snack. This will give you an opportunity to refuel your energy, check your shopping list, and reorganize your shopping strategy if needed.



Arrange for a sitter to care for small children or family members that may require supervision. Children tire easily and can become bored. Spouses or other family members may not share the same shopping locations or techniques. Careful shopping requires attention to detail which is seriously compromised by distractions, nagging or demands from other shopping partners.

WHAT TO SHOP FOR

Knowing what to shop for sounds like such a simple matter. However, it is often the simple things that cause the greatest problems!

Bargains! Bargains! Bargains!

These words can bring sparkles to the eyes of many a shopping addict. Items on sale, however, are not necessarily bargains. A true bargain depends on individual need, timing and price. No matter the markdown, an item is not a bargain if:

- it does not fit and it needs extensive altering,
- you have nothing in your closet to go with it,
- it is not on your "need" or "want" list,
- it is no longer in fashion,
- you cannot try it on and it can't be returned,
- it is not an appropriate color, style or texture,
- the quality is poor or substandard,
- you are purchasing it as a gift and you are not sure of the size, and;
- the cost still exceeds your budget.

Buying at a sale is well and good if you can drop everything when the sale occurs. Comparison shopping will save you money, but it does increase the amount of time spent in the marketplace.

Quality Merchandise

A good shopping rule to follow is to purchase the best quality item you can afford. Stanley Marcus, cofounder of the well-known Neiman-Marcus department stores explains his thoughts on quality in this manner:

You should buy the best you can afford, not the poorest of what you can't. From the best quality you will get the most satisfaction, the longest wear and the enjoyment of knowing it is the best without having to apologize for it.¹

Judging quality does not take a degree in apparel production. However, a discriminating eye and an adequate amount of time are very important. Garments should be evaluated according to appearance, fit, durability, intended use and care requirements. Play clothes for children will be rated differently than a party dress. Each consumer must evaluate based on his/her individual priorities and garment needs.

Garments purchased for investment dressing should fit well, be flattering to the individual, coordinate with other items in the wardrobe and be durable enough to withstand many seasons' of wear and proper care. Generally speaking, the original garment price is a reliable overall indicator of quality. Also, the more detail or hand-labor involved in the production of the garment, the higher the cost.

Consumers will also pay more for a well-known brand or a designer trademark despite its quality. In this instance price is not an indicator of quality.

The time and value of selecting and purchasing clothing for the wardrobe should never be regarded as frivolous or without merit. The clothes we wear each day communicates to the world around us who we are and how we want to be treated. Our clothes are truly our second skin. Time, attention and a bit of wisdom yields shopping savvy.

¹ Chic on a Shoestring, Annette Swanberg & Leigh Charlton, p. 127.

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