

## Smartphone shoppers see app-y holiday season

November 24 2013, by Rob Lever

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Shoppers admire a holiday window display of the Lord & Taylor Flagship store, in New York, on November 13, 2013

When Georgia Benjamin goes holiday shopping this year, her smartphone will be her guide, pointing her to the items she is seeking and the best deals.

A transplanted Londoner working in New York as a fashion design

intern, Benjamin said she has been using Snapette, a mobile app that allows her to find items in nearby [retail stores](#).

"There are things on the app that I might not see otherwise," she said.

"If I'm looking for a pair of sunglasses, I will type in the brand name, and it will show me what is nearby. And it will alert me if a store nearby has a promotion."

In the past, Benjamin told AFP, she would "trudge from store to store on Oxford Street" in London, or "go through website after website" to search for holiday gifts.

As the [holiday shopping](#) season opens, shoppers will be armed with smartphones and an array of apps. Some will compare prices, offer gift suggestions, provide price alerts and more.

Snapette says nearly two million people have downloaded the app for iPhones or Android handsets to fill a need for people who want to use online tools but shop in local stores.

"Over 85 percent of retail sales is happening in stores but there wasn't a great way to search for or discover products nearby," said Sarah Paiji, co-founder and president of Snapette.

"We want to enable that shopper to shop in the real world as well as online."

Snapette, which was acquired this year by online commerce site PriceGrabber, has data from some 270 US retailers and can direct a consumer to an in-store product, but also allows them to buy online directly from the app.



People walk past a sign advertising for Christmas gifts, in New York, on November 19, 2013

Scores of other smartphone apps also can be used by on-the-go shoppers. Amazon has one allowing a price check with the online retailer. Others can deliver digital coupons.

One called RedLaser will scan a bar code and tell a shopper if the product is less expensive somewhere else. Smoopo will similarly tell a consumer if the store price is a bargain. Zoomingo helps find sales in

local retail stores and allows consumers to share ideas.

ShopSavvy, a mobile shopping assistant that is one of the first apps developed for Android phones four years ago, has had some 40 million downloads and has data from 40,000 retailers in Austria, Britain, Germany, Japan and the United States.

"It gives the retailer a new way to communicate with the customer," co-founder and chief executive John Boyd told AFP.

"I think it helps people buy products and to some extent it drives new sales. People are really well-armed with ShopSavvy. If there is a big price discrepancy, they have a local price check. We also let them know if they find a better price online."

ShopSavvy, which is available for iPhones and Windows Phone as well as Android, also provides reviews and product details, and helps people organize shopping lists.

It partners with a wide range of retail stores, including grocery, apparel and home improvement, but Boyd called it a "a neutral aggregator."

The growing app use comes with retailers struggling to keep pace with surging online shopping.

An NPD survey found 75 percent of smartphone users will use the device as part of their holiday shopping, with many helped by in-store apps from retailers like Target or Macy's, as well as external ones like Snapette.



This file photo shows people standing in line outside Macy's department store in New York, awaiting the midnight opening to begin the "Black Friday" shopping weekend, November 24, 2011

The National Retail Federation said it expects 97 million people to shop on Black Friday, the traditional start of the holiday shopping season after Thanksgiving Day. That will kick off a holiday season expected to see some \$600 billion in sales, including \$80 billion online.

But the lines between online and offline shopping are blurring: consumers may research a product online and then buy it in a store, or view something in a store and then buy from a mobile device.

"We want to be a comprehensive, one-stop shop where you can browse products online as well as nearby," said Paiji.

In recent years, consumers have been driven to a practice known as

"showrooming," or visiting a store to see a product, then purchasing it online at a lower price.

But Paiji said apps like Snapette "are the reverse of showrooming" because they encourage people to buy products in stores.

Boyd said apps like ShopSavvy show that online buying is not always the best deal, especially considering shipping costs and new rules requiring many e-commerce sites to collect sales taxes.

"I think the playing field is more equal," he said. "This is an opportunity for retailers."

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