

Black Friday's best deals may be in your mobile phone

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At Toys "R" Us, you can forget the ol'-fashioned, paper and pencil holiday wish list - go high-tech with the toy retailer's app designed for the iPad.

Spot a good deal on [Black Friday](#) and use the Black Flyday app on an Android phone to send it out immediately to all your Facebook friends.

This year's holiday season is when technology and social media join the mainstream, aiming to make the [shopping](#) experience more interactive and, hopefully, more productive. For bargain hunters, it's a way to become a more savvy shopper.

Any variety of downloadable apps can help you find the best bargains. Use FastMall to pull up maps of your local malls stretching. Stay on top of the best deals by signing up for [text message](#) alerts from retailers like Kmart, Victoria's Secret and Bath & Body Works.

"More people are wanting to use their phone to enhance their in-store shopping experience," said Jeffrey Grau, principal analyst with eMarketer, a digital marketing research firm. "Mobile and social are going to play a bigger role this holiday season. It's only going to get bigger."

Retailers have definitely taken notice and there's hardly a major national chain that you won't find on Facebook or Twitter. JCPenney has nearly 1.3 million Facebook fans and Toys "R" Us is pushing the 1 million

mark. Those fans get everything from special discounts to sneak peeks on merchandise.

"It's somewhere you have to be," said Greg Ahearn, senior vice president of marketing and e-commerce for Toys "R" Us. "This is where the customers are."

At Macy's, social media and mobile marketing have been growing by double digits, making it just as important - or maybe more so - than traditional marketing.

"It's a more effective tool because you're engaging in a dialogue with the consumer," said Martine Reardon, executive vice president of marketing for Macy's. "Now she feels better about who she is doing business with and it creates a more fulfilling, emotional connection. That ultimately leads to more frequency of visits and higher sales."

Four out of 10 retailers will use Facebook to promote deals this [holiday season](#), according to the National Retail Federation.

More than one-fourth of Americans who have a smartphone will use their mobile device to shop for gifts, compare prices and research products, according to an NRF survey by BIGresearch. That number reaches 45 percent among 18-24 year-olds and 43.5 percent of 25-34 year-olds.

These are shoppers like Ashley Labrie, who doesn't buy a thing without first checking her iPhone. When the 26-year-old deal-hunting maven finds a great pair of pants, she fires up her phone's browser in the dressing room to see if that size and style number comes cheaper on eBay.

Her phone is armed with coupon apps like Yowza!! and Coupon Sherpa,

which let her know what stores near her have the best bargains. Occasionally, the apps showcase coupons of interest to her like Express, Bath and Body Works and Borders. But more often than not, she's disappointed.

"Most of them are useless," said Labrie, a Pembroke Pines, Fla., graphic designer. "If Express has a printable coupon, it's going to be better than what's on my phone."

Retailers also are trying creative ways to encourage customers to have fun with their brand online. Toys "R" Us lets you create a personalized version of the hot toy Sing-a-ma-jig. On Macy's Facebook page, customers can play a game trying to help Virginia and Ollie deliver a letter to Santa Claus.

Sears wants you to drum up enough support among your Facebook friends to earn a discounted price on some of their hot holiday items with the Wish Together [app](#).

"We found this is a really unique way to connect with our customers and to get real-time feedback," said Eui Chung, divisional vice president and general manager for social commerce at Sears.

It's all about creating a more interactive experience. That's also the focus behind apps like CheckPoints and Shopkick.

Shopkick has partnerships nationally with Target, Best Buy, Macy's, Sports Authority, Wet Seal, American Eagle and Simon Property Group's malls. Customers score kickbucks by simply walking into a mall or store and checking in on their iPhone or Android phone. They also get more kickbucks by scanning barcodes on select items.

"It makes it fun for the shopper," said Lynette Lauria, Florida regional

vice president of marketing with Simon Property Group.

Rack up a total of 875 kickbucks and shoppers can earn a \$25 restaurant gift certificate. Reach higher totals and you can earn free movie tickets or a Coach gift card.

"The idea is to give you a reason for walking in," said Cyriac Roeding, co-founder and chief executive of Shopkick. "Once you're inside the store it's likely that you're going to find something you might want to buy."

Malls like Sawgrass Mills in Sunrise, Fla., are trying to give customers a reason to walk in with special deals only available through social marketing channels. At the mall, a Foursquare deal is offered daily to the first shoppers of the day at select stores. Facebook deals are a mix of exclusive offers and general promotions.

"We want to present a value to them that can't be something they've already seen elsewhere," said Kelly Mikesell, vice president of marketing The Mills. "The name of the game is driving traffic and sales."

FREE SHOPPING APPS

Black Flyday - Post a good Black Friday deal or see a map of where others have buzzed about sales (Android)

CheckPoints - Earn points toward gift cards and airline miles by scanning barcodes of products and checking into stores (iPhone)

Coupon Sherpa - Scan through list of major retailers to see what mobile coupons they offer (iPhone)

FastMall - Search a directory map of stores in a mall, and shake phone to find nearest restroom (iPhone)

Giftmeister - Helps give tech gift suggestions for different personalities and find who is selling it for cheapest (iPhone, Android)

Point Inside - Pull up a map of a mall or airport and search for where customer service and management offices are (iPhone, Android)

PriceGrabber - Scan barcodes and compare online prices, or share your wish list with friends (iPhone, Android)

Shopkick - Earn rewards like gift certificates for checking into stores and scanning barcodes

TheFind - Scan barcodes of any product to see who is selling it for cheaper in another store or online (iPhone, Android)

Yowza!! - Find what stores near you have mobile coupons (iPhone)

Where - Find what stores near you have mobile coupons and check into locations (iPhone, Android, BlackBerry, HP Palm)

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