Dollar Days

POZ gives you the scoop on what to put in your cart—and what to throw back—at the 99 cents store.

November 1, 2009 By Kellee Terrell

The recession has forced many stores to file for bankruptcy, but discount and dollar stores still bring in the green. Their vast selections of low-priced items—from shower curtains to snacks to socks—entice penny-pinchers in droves. But not all steals are created equal. I hit up a few discount stores in New York City to sort the deals from the duds.

Pick up:

- Kitchen and housing accessories. Silverware, spatulas, candleholders, pails and oven mitts are must-haves. Grab cartfulls of these items, especially dish-washing utensils and sponges.

- Wrapping paper, gift bags and party favors. Last Christmas, I saved a lot of money on large bags—they were as decorative as those in more expensive stores.

Hair/clothing accessories. I stock up on dress socks, combs, ponytail holders, lint brushes and sewing kits.

Pass on:

- Vitamins and over-the-counter medications. You can’t really be sure where they’re from or if they’ll work. To save money and ensure efficacy, buy a generic version at your local drug store.

- Cleaners. Many experts claim that they are a steal, but I say pass. Non-brand name products can be filled with harmful chemicals. For two or three more bucks, buy eco-friendly cleaners instead and breathe easy.

- Electronics. Christmas lights and extension cords might be faulty and could possibly start a fire in your home. Dole out the extra cash for these. Safety first!

HAND-ME-UPS: Need a new blazer for work, or looking for a deal on a polo shirt? Peruse secondhand shops such as Goodwill and Salvation Army. They are a good place to score some cheap finds, and you'll also be helping those in need. I recently scooped up an Old Navy wrap sweater for $6, gold earrings for a few bucks and hardback books for a dollar apiece. Go to goodwill.org and salvationarmy.com to find a location in your city.

SAVE MONEY NOW

Love TV, but not a fan of your cable bill? Greg Karp, author of The 1-2-3 Money Plan: The Three Most Important Steps to Saving and Spending Smart, offers tips to cut the boob tube expenses.

Downgrade your service. If you're not watching all of the premium channels or feel as if nothing is on, downgrade to basic cable. If you like a show that's on HBO or Showtime, order that channel when it's in season, and cancel that channel when the season ends.

Opt for a mail-in movie service such as Netflix and Blockbuster. You can watch the exact movies and programs offered on premium channels—but have them delivered to your home, for a price that's cheaper than cable. Plus, you get to watch the DVD extras!

Use the Internet. Log on and watch commercial-free and cost-free episodes on Hulu, YouTube and network websites. All you need are a computer and an Internet connection.

Go to the library. Tax money funds your local library, which offers more than books. Libraries carry the newest releases, old classics and children's films—for no charge. PS: Reading is also free!

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