

5 Tips for Electronics Shopping This Season

Written by Johann Taylor

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Shiny new toys for the holidays are just as much fun now as they were when we were kids. The only difference is they cost a heck of a lot more. When looking for new computers or other electronics during this season of blow-out sales and early morning door-busters it can be hard to tell when you are really getting your money's worth, or when that salesman just talked you into buying a piece of junk. Since our technicians are often asked to fix said junk, we know what to look for and what not to. Here are some quick tips to consider before you head out to the war zone...I mean the mall, tomorrow morning.

1) Look for quality first, then price - This may be obvious, but those awesome sales are usually awesome for the retailer, not usually for you. There is a reason they can afford to sell things so cheap. Sometimes it is to get you in the store to buy other things; sometimes it is because the sale item is a piece of junk. Your job is to know the difference. That said, the best advice is to find something you want, do your research, *the*
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wait for it to go on sale. It may be cheap today, but when it breaks just out of warranty, you'll be sorry.

2) Know what brands to look for - This is a big one. Don't just buy the shiny one. Some brands are known for quality, others for being the "cheapest" (not always least-expensive) option. Here are the brands that we have found to be reliable, and those that are usually less-so.

Good	OK	Bad!
Lenovo	Dell (Laptops)	HP/Compaq
ASUS	Toshiba	Acer
Dell (Desktops)	Gateway	
EMachines		

Lenovo's are built like tanks, and are my first choice, but ASUS is just as good. On the other hand, HP/Compaq has some nasty quality control issues that they need to work out. I've spoken to an engineer about the problems, but I don't know whether they are planning to fix them or not. Acer and Gateway are so bad, that every time I work on one I swear I'll never touch one again.

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3) Ignore the sales people - Sorry to tell you this, but don't listen to the sales guys in big box stores. Once in a while you'll get lucky and find someone who knows what they are talking about, but normally they either don't, or want to sell you whatever they make the most on.

4) Don't buy a computer at a warehouse store or anywhere with -Mart in the name - These stores buy electronics that have identical counterparts elsewhere, but are made of inferior materials. This is why they are cheaper. Stay away at all costs.

5) Extended Warranties are a Waste of Money - When I used to work at Sears selling appliances, we usually made 3-5% on appliances, but sometimes as much as 15% on protection plans. This is because stores make HUGE profits on extended warranties, and the warranty service usually covers a lot less than they lead you to believe. The best tip I have heard is that whenever you are offered an extended warranty, put the cost of the warranty into a special bank account just for that purpose. Over time, you will have enough cash in there to just buy new stuff when something breaks. Accidental damage plans on the other hand, can be gold depending on what's covered.

Hopefully these tips help you avoid the buyer's remorse that inevitably comes after buying something you really shouldn't have. If you still need help, the best place to buy a new computer is from an independent computer store where you can get personalized attention. We are always happy to help you find exactly what you need at a price you can afford.