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Big Box Not Necessarily Best Bet

When buying anything from furniture to electronics, consumers are often inclined to turn to their nearby big box store as a first stop in comparison shopping.

Although big box retailers do offer competitive prices, they may not be the best option for consumers trying to stay on budget or close to it. Boutique shops, local merchants, and independent online retailers often offer competitive prices and better overall service than bigger chains.

Good Things Come in Smaller Packages

Price is a major factor in where people shop. Millions of people turn to big box retailers thinking they will get the best prices, but a little research can yield other findings. While some bigger chains may offer doorbuster sales luring customers in with the "item du jour," in general, prices on most everyday items are the same or higher than other retailers. All it takes is an online comparison of a certain product to show the similarity in pricing.

Shopping in smaller stores or independent online retailers also may be preferable to many consumers. The trend is to revitalize "Main Street Canada" by shop-

ping smaller retailers and Mom & Pop establishments. Some companies actually offer incentives to do so.

Better Service, Low Prices

Many shoppers, particularly younger shoppers with less disposable income, are under the mistaken impression that big box retailers are the best way to shop due to widespread advertising by these retail giants. This type of shopping, however, could come at the expense of poor customer service or limited selection. Many independent retailers offer price matching to remain competitive with the larger merchants in the area, and it's hard to beat independent retailers on customer service or the availability of a wide selection of distinct items.

What sets smaller retailers apart from big box retailers is their dedication to service and providing customers with extensive product information, including customer product reviews, to help them make an informed decision.

Smaller Crowds and Fewer Hassles

Another advantage to shopping smaller retailers is that shoppers don't have to drive long distances, fight crowds, endure long lines, or

hunt for parking spots, making for a stress-free shopping experience that's also smart from an environmental standpoint.

Because of a more specialized selection, dedicated product specialists also may be more knowledgeable about the stock and functionality of certain items.

Local Gives More Back

A September 2009 study in Civic Economics titled "Thinking Outside the Box: A Report on Independent Merchants and the Local Economy," reviewed financial data from 15 locally owned businesses and compared these stores' impact on the local economy to that of an average big box store. The study found that only 16 percent of the money spent at a big box store stays in the local economy. In contrast, the local retailers returned more than 32 percent of their revenue to the local economy.

In many cases, local businesses also shop local, equipping their stores and building their Web sites with resources from other local companies.

Customers who normally lean toward bigger retailers may want to experience the benefits of shopping outside the box.



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