

Purchasing Big-Ticket Items

Buying big-ticket items such as appliances, TVs or furniture is often a major financial decision. Even though you may need to buy the item immediately, it's important to plan carefully. Take time to shop around to make sure you are getting the best value product to suit your needs. Buying a big-ticket item is likely to be an item you will have for many years. Therefore, it's important you make the right decision in order to get long-lasting use and save money as well.

Research

To get the right product for you, first identify what your needs are. Then research the range of products and options available on the market to suit those needs. Before you start shopping around, ask your self the following:

- **What will the item's use be?** Consider the present as well as the future. Will it get a lot of use, or is it mainly for decorative purposes?
- **Are there any extra features that I want?** Decide on any extra features, colors and safety options you feel you may need or want.
- **Think about the size of the item.** If necessary, measure the space it has to fit in.
- **Decide on a price range.** Be sure you can afford what you have as your budgeted price for the item.

Once you have made your decisions, begin researching the products that are offered. Talk to friends and family about brands and stores with which they have been satisfied. Search the Internet and refer to catalogs and consumer publications to get an idea of prices. Visit a few different stores and ask for information. Compare the quality and cost of the items. Cheap items may not last as long as more expensive alternatives. Investigate refund and warranty options. A somewhat more expensive item with a much longer warranty period may be worth considering. Before you make the purchase, find out what the refund policy of the store is. Be aware that you might not be entitled to a refund if you merely feel you selected the wrong product or change your mind later.

Interest-Free Options

Many retailers offer interest-free deals as an option when purchasing big ticket items. You should approach interest-free deals with caution. When you agree to an interest-free arrangement, you are entering into a loan contract. Most often, the loan is interest-free only if the entire loan is repaid within the agreed interest-free period. If you do not pay the loan in full during this time period, you will likely end up paying high interest rates. These rates are frequently calculated from the date you purchased the goods. Read and understand the terms and conditions of any interest-free offer before signing a contract. If you choose to use an interest-free option, you must identify what you are required to pay, the due date, and look for other fees that may apply. By using these suggestions, you may be a much smarter shopper the next time you need to purchase a big-ticket item.

For more information on this or related topics, contact Ruth Brock, Regional Extension Agent for Consumer Science and Personal Financial Management. She serves Blount, Cullman, Jefferson, St. Clair, Shelby, and Walker Counties. You can reach her at the Blount County office at (205) 274-2129 or email at brockru@auburn.edu.

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