



Extension News Column

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The holiday season is upon us. We are all worried about getting everything done that we need to in the time we have. Time management becomes important. However, did you realize that time management has an effect on your spending?

Merchants bank on this. The longer you stay in the store, the more money you spend. So a disorganized holiday list can keep you in the store longer and let you spend more money. If we are pinching pennies, we want to get in the store, get our items, and get out quickly.

There are two extremes when we are talking about Christmas shoppers. The one that enjoys the season and likes to wander through the store, enjoying the Christmas music, and seeing what strikes their fancy. Not that it is wrong to enjoy the Christmas hustle and bustle, but we want to become efficient shoppers. Efficient shoppers start with a list, organize their trips for low traffic times of the day, and don't get distracted by the end of the aisle specials.

I love Christmas. I love to find just the right present for each person on my list, but I am an efficient shopper. Let's look at how you can improve your efficiency and planning is key.

Start with a list. First you have to make a list of all those people for whom you need to buy. Make sure you include friends and work associates. Then establish your budget.

How much can you afford to spend on each present? Then think through what gifts might be appropriate for each person on your list.

The News Miner delivers the best shopping guide to me every Sunday morning. That is always my second step. I look at the circulars that come in the newspaper to see what might be appropriate for each present. Now remember that one of the reasons the merchants deliver those circulars to you is to get you in the store and keep you there to spend more money. They get you in the store with a "loss leader", an item they may even lose money on, just to get you through the door to pay higher prices on other items. So plan your shopping for low traffic times of the day to get in and out without distractions.

I am an early riser, so one of my tricks is to run by the stores that open early on my way to work. Many of the discount stores open at 7, as well as home improvement stores. It is a great time to get in and out. Middle of the morning is also a great time to go shopping.

Noon, between 5 and 6, from noon to five on Saturday, and Sunday afternoon are usually the highest traffic times. But consider where you are shopping, times may be different in the stores you want to shop in.

Also let your fingers do the walking as the old saying goes. Call ahead and see if they have items, particularly if they are in the sales circular. They may sell out quickly, or because it is Alaska, they may not have come in at all.

Now as you blow through the store, you may find something that is more appropriate for someone on your list, so keep your eyes open. Ask yourself a couple of questions before you pick up that item? Is it the same cost or less than the item you had intended to buy? Is it really as good a fit as your previous selection? If so, pick it up. But remember it is a substitution for the old item, not an addition. Your list shouldn't grow during the shopping trip.

Be sure to stay focused on your list, not on your own wants. They say that 82% of women who are out doing Christmas shopping end up buying items for themselves. If we are pinching pennies this holiday season, don't splurge on yourself.

Use careful planning to become an efficient shopper.