

Are we slaves to consumerism?

As I roamed the aisles of my favorite stores over the last couple of weeks (good prices require research), I noticed something peculiar. In one store, though we were still almost two weeks from Halloween, something against the back wall caught my eye. No, it wasn't the fall harvest decorations I was hoping to see; rather it was shelves stocked with Christmas lights.

Huh?

Wait, it's only mid-October! We don't even have a World Series champion yet and Christmas lights were already for sale!

It's part of a disturbing trend many of us have noticed over the past few years: holiday and special sales occur earlier and earlier each year. Don't believe me? Do you remember seeing school supplies for sale in your favorite big box store in July or clothing stores beginning to stock school uniforms?

When I saw those displays I got a little sad. I love school and school supplies (yes, I'm that kind of nerd), but many kids had only been on summer break for less than one month before parents, teachers, and care givers had to start worrying about the next school year. And because we want to stick up and get the best deals possible, we go along with the sales when they occur. But is that the best thing to do? If we continue buying in this particular economic pattern, does that encourage retailers to push merchandise on us whenever they please?

I fear the answer might be yes.

For example, take Starbucks. Right around Labor Day, Starbucks told us it was fall by introducing classic fall drinks and flavors, along with new drink ware to match. One problem, it was still technically summer. We were reminded of that by some pretty warm days that month. Shortly after reading this, if you haven't already, you'll see the winter holiday drinks and signature red Christmas hot cups at Starbucks. Yes, Starbucks does dictate our seasons.

Now don't get me wrong, I love it when Peppermint Mocha espresso is back on the menu, but I felt a little guilty drinking it when it was only the end of October.

Soon, in Target and other stores, Halloween items will be offered at a steep discount, there will be a few things around for Thanksgiving, but the emphasis and space will be devoted to Christmas and Hanukkah. And, as we all know, that retail train doesn't stop until after the new year when we will be encouraged to shop for the next major retail holiday: Valentine's Day.



Image via: Freedigitalphotos

So what does all this mean? Have we become consumer zombies and victims of our own desires to beat the competition and get the best deals? Maybe, but it doesn't have to be that way. I have a couple of ideas to keep the consumer monster at bay:

1. Stock up on holiday décor and other items that can be safely stored until the next year. The best time to do that is right after that particular holiday when prices are at their lowest and on clearance.

2. Make a decision about when you and your family will start to purchase holiday items.

The retailers can't tell you when and how to spend your money. Get wise and plan for each holiday so you are not compelled by sales or last minute purchases because you failed to plan. After all, these same holidays occur every year, so there is no surprise!

3. Keep track of sales cycles.

Though this may sound harder than it is, it's really simple to keep track of when things you might need will go on sale. Need fitness gear? January and February are great for buying new items as people are still fresh on their resolutions. The beginning and end of seasons are good for clothing, accessories, and shoes. If you're a little nerdy like me, keep a spreadsheet of the items you're saving for and note each week your favorite store has it on sale. That's what I'm doing while I save up for a new computer and iPad (Target gift card with purchase). If that's too much work or you just don't have time, check out the ladies who run the site <https://thekrazycouponlady.com>. They have articles and videos to help you know what goes on sale each month of the year. It's been a huge help to me!

4. All great deals don't happen on Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

While it's nice to take advantage of offers on those days, most of the better deals come in the categories of electronics, gaming, etc. Kudos to you if you want to brave those crowds, just remember to take time and celebrate Thanksgiving with your family first. Also, if you've been paying attention to sale cycles, you may notice some Black Friday prices aren't the lowest of the year. I know it's easy to get caught up in the excitement, but cooler heads will prevail in this case. Another good way to do this is to purchase gifts as the year goes on!

5. Remember the small businesses.

All businesses had to start somewhere and your community stores are a great way to break free from some consumer madness - especially going into the winter holiday season. Reinvesting money into your community is why Small Business Saturday exists the day after Black Friday. Take some time to shop in your neighborhood, meet your neighbors and build communities. Charm City Run is always one of my favorites!

Those are my best five tips for helping you break the chains of consumerism and

send a message to companies that you value time in your community and with your family and no sale or early display of merchandise is going to change that. That's how we affect change - one day and one person at a time!

Leave a comment and share how you will break the bonds of consumer slavery and take back the holiday season!