



The DebtGuru Holiday Success Guide and Planner

Courtesy of DebtGuru.com and The American Credit Foundation[®]

You don't have to be Scrooge to save money, you just have to be smart during this season of giving. Unfortunately most of us suffer from the gift that keeps on giving: holiday debt. Americans on average will spend six months paying off our holiday debts.

Fortunately, with a plan, simple budget and the easy to follow tactics laid out in this guide you can get everything you wanted from this holiday season and come out with little to no debts.

To win the game you need a plan.

How To Use This Guide Effectively

You've heard it all before. To avoid going into debt you simply earn more and spend less. Not difficult right? However, contained below, there are a few important elements you may not have thought of that will make all the difference. This guide will help you create a simple holiday strategy and support it with information on smart buying habits that will result in real savings. Your holiday strategy has four basic elements.

1. Setting specific goals so you know what is truly important to you at all times.
2. Setting a realistic budget so you feel good about what you're spending.
3. Learn and deploy savvy holiday buying tactics to save more money.
4. Printing your personal Holiday Success Guide so you are more apt to follow it!

Below we will walk you through these simple steps to be successful over the holidays. It will only take you about 30 minutes to get fully prepared, yet you could save a significant amount of money while having one of the best holiday seasons ever.

Timing is everything when it comes to saving money.



The fact is each holiday season is very easy to plan for since the holidays fall on specific dates and holiday events like dinners and parties tend to revolve around the weekends. Retailers know this cycle and offer their best deals AND highest prices at very specific times. They are trying to make more money and you're trying to save it. If you plan your holiday calendar, budget, shopping and goals around the best times to buy, you will beat the retailers at their own game. Creating this plan in advance gives you the ability to use great timing to get what you want at the best prices possible. Timing will be your friend this season.

Goals For The Best Holiday Ever



A goal is simply a wish you would like to make a reality during the Holidays. You need not go through a time consuming process of setting up all sorts of detailed goals, but you do need to identify the MAIN goals you have for the holidays. What would make your holiday season a great one? EG: Getting the perfect presents for each family member, having a holiday dinner party, and taking a special weekend ski trip? These might be the goals that would mean having a successful holiday season to you. To make them a reality you need to plan for them in advance.

Overspending is the result of no planning combined with making emotion based decisions. How many times have you become a little sentimental and said "oh heck I love my kids and this only comes around once a year so I'll buy it?" The extra present, the more expensive wine, movies or another dinner at a restaurant? Splurging once might be fine, but if emotional buying takes over, your likely to give up on

the budget and throw it into the "I'll deal with it next year category". This is what we call Holiday Debt Denial. Don't fall into an emotional spending frenzy.

Having a clear set of goals based upon what is truly important to you and putting a specific dollar amount to each of them will help you stay the course. This way you won't feel guilty NOT spending when the falling snowflakes and holiday songs strum your heart strings to purchase just a little bit more...

Bah Humbug to Budgets!

Yes, budgets, budgets, budgets! You just knew you were going to have to come up with a budget. And well... you were right. However, we make it super easy for you to create a budget including your goals in one fell swoop, which we'll show you a little later. The fact is a plan without a budget is a plan to overspend. The entire purpose of this guide is to help you avoid overspending and going into debt, so yes a little budgeting is necessary.

Using this guide to create a budget and your plan is easy!

- You'll complete a personal Holiday guide with all of your holiday goals and dates.
- You'll associate a general cost for each of these goals
- You'll enter in the amount of money you have to spend
- The worksheet will total them all up for you.

(You'll see the worksheet below, but for now keep reading)

Following these steps, you will have a created realistic and smart spending plan based on real dollars that if you follow will result in a successful Holiday season without debt.

How should I determine the amount I can spend in my budget?

When you determine how much money you have or will have available to pay for all your goals we do **NOT** want you to include using any type of credit card debt, loans or layaway programs. When you create a budget you should be using only the savings you have ready now and the income you will be receiving throughout the season.

It's time to create your Personal Holiday Guide



This guide will not ask you to create a complicated budget and expense form that would make the IRS nervous, but we do think it is prudent to create a simple list of your goals with their associated cost. We have taken all of the concepts in this guide and put them into a simple printable worksheet you can complete in about 15 minutes.

[Download Your Holiday Success Planner Here](#)

Holiday Success Planner Instructions

- List your holiday goals
- Associate a cost for each of your goals
- Enter on your calendar important dates to take action (we've noted a few for you)
- Enter in the amount you have to pay for holiday expenses.
- Print the plan

Does your total expenses for your goals exceed your ability to pay for them without financing them on your credit card for more than 30 days?

If you're short on money to meet your goals, continue reading all the consumer tips we have below, you just may free up enough money to meet all your goals. But if not, it is perfectly reasonable to trim down the amounts you can spend for each goal. Trim down until you are within your budget.

Ask yourself; If you could do all of these things on your goal list would you feel like you had a successful holiday season?

Yes? Excellent!

Guide to Smart Spending Over the Holidays

The holiday season has powerful incentives to spend more money than we should. We have taken some of the most common holiday expenses and provided smart buying tactics to save you money.

Smart Use of Credit Cards

* Cash and savings should be your primary method to pay for your holiday. Using cash keeps your spending real and you are far less likely to overspend when you hand cash to the teller and not your card. That said, if you do choose to use your credit card, follow these tips to keep your budget in check.

* Never spend more on your credit card than you can pay off entirely within the next payment cycle, normally 26-30 days. Your goal is to pay it off before being charged interest by your credit card company.

* Use credit cards that offer you points, perks, or discounts.

* Many dept. stores push their store credit card at the checkout counter with the enticement of a 10-20% discount on that single purchase. STOP. Realize that most of these cards come with a 19.99% or higher interest rate. Now think if you are going to really pay that amount off within the next 26-30 days. If not, then your discount will be eaten up by the interest you will pay. This discount hook rarely pays off in the long run.

* Big Purchases - During the holidays high ticket items like refrigerators, washing machines, HDTVs and more all go on sale. In addition if you pay with a dept. store card you could get an additional 10%-20%

off. This can work in your favor, but again you need to calculate how soon you will be able to pay this loan off. So if you purchase that \$1,500 refrigerator and get 10% off using the store card that is a \$100 savings. However, at 20% interest on \$1,500 your savings will be gone if you don't pay it off in the first month. Always run the numbers before you make your purchase.

Final Note on Credit Cards:

Credit Card Companies offer short term deals because they know consumers can't resist accumulating long term debt. Don't give yourself the chance to go into debt. After the Holidays cut up any credit cards you may have acquired that you truly do not need. This will remove the temptation to lean on them throughout the New Year.

Winning at Holiday Parties and Dinners



We all hold or attend holiday parties. These events are usually announced well in advance of their date or if you celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years then you know the exact day for which you can plan your purchases.

Write down each of the events you plan on attending or holding in your Personal Holiday Guide.

Assign a specific budget for each of these events. Now you will know exactly when you will need the money and how much you would like to spend.

Buying for Dinner events

Grocery stores increase prices on staple holiday items by as much as 15% on the days leading up to a holiday weekend. Yes, they have enticing single item deals which is why we recommended you sign up for their email list. However, meats, drinks and deserts often sell at a premium.

Before heading to the grocery store - go online and review the grocery store's website for online coupons you can print.

Purchase items in advance when they are on sale and store or freeze until party time. Purchasing food two weeks in advance can save a significant amount of money.

Bulk Purchasing:

Having a dinner party and also have a few presents you think you should get for your office mates? Purchase 6 or 12 bottles of wine at one time. Buying wine in bulk comes with a 10%-20% discount at most retailers. Better yet, you just purchased 12 presents in one easy stop and shop.

Office Gifts:

Make your own quick office gifts. Dollar discount stores sell see through or foil gift wrap squares you can turn into a small gift wrapped pouch. Many food stores offer bulk container foods such as chocolate treats, cookies or hard candies. Purchase these in bulk, wrap them in a Holiday foil wrap with a nice bow and you have \$1 gifts for 12 of your office mates. They might even share with you!

Online Shopping

Let's face it, most holiday spending now takes place online. It only makes sense to learn how to use online shopping tools to your advantage to save time and money.

Use the best online tools to compare products and prices across thousands of stores.

There are two primary types of websites that can help you save money:

Comparison Shopping Websites:

With thousands of retailers selling the same product, who offers the best price? You enter the product you're interested in and the Shopping comparison site finds that product in all the top retailers website and presents the pricing. This makes finding the best price easy. Examples of comparison sites are:

Everything Shopping Engines

- Google Shopping: <http://www.Google.com/Shopping>
- Amazon: Yes of course! <http://www.Amazon.com>

Specialized Shopping Engines:

- PriceGrabber: <http://www.pricegrabber.com>
Price grabber makes shopping for prices easy by offering more than just products, but they also list the best "Deals of the day" for product categories like Technology, furniture, or appliances.
- <http://www.Zappos.com> - Specializes in Shoes and Clothing. They offer great search tools like showing all products according to your exact size. This makes weeding out products where there is no stock in your size easy.

Price Tracker Websites



Perhaps you have found the product you want to purchase, but you're not ready to buy, the price is just too high, but you want to monitor the price just in case it goes on sale. That is what a price tracker website does. You enter in the exact product and it will track the price and send you an email update when the price drops:

See: SlickDeals.net <http://slickdeals.net/pricetracker/>

Green Eggs and Spam?



Spam is when you receive an unsolicited email that has little to no value to you, but don't confuse that with joining a retailer's special offers email program. Retailers today have large digital marketing departments who have the singular goal to get you to buy from their store. Continuously looking for deals online, or simply buying items only when you happen to physically go into the store is both time consuming and getting a great deal is a matter of luck. Why not put these marketers to work for you?

Think about the products you wish to buy and who you will likely buy them from. Go to their website and sign up for their special offer emails. Retailers commonly offer discounts via email that they do not offer online, because they know that once you're in the store you are there to buy, why discount too much at this point? Joining email lists like this brings all the latest deals to your inbox in a timely fashion and when you're done with the holidays you can simply unsubscribe.

Shopping Cart Tease

Did you know that all online stores track your visits and know when you have put something into your online shopping cart? They do this so that if you leave without buying, they can send you an incentive to come back and finish the purchase. Well let them! The next time you're shopping online, place the item of interest in your shopping basket, then go through the check out process to the point of entering in your email address - but NOT your payment details. Then. LEAVE.

Within a few hours or a day you will most likely receive an email discount offer for that very product!

Black Friday



remainder of the season.

Black Friday is traditionally the Friday after Thanksgiving Day where retailers offer IN-STORE deals. In recent years this tradition has grown to be a big event, however retailers just can't keep their promise of holding the event on just one day... nor just to their physical stores. Black Friday sales start on November 4th and generally will run for the

Timing: Retailers start and end their sales on 7 day cycles from Sunday through Saturday.

We recommend you go to the website of the retailers near you and sign up for their weekly sale, or weekly ad service. You will receive an email about the latest deals as soon as they are offered to the public.

Websites that specialize in tracking Black Friday and Cyber Monday deals also exist. These folks will find the weekly flyers that retailers put out and present them on their website. This way you can see all the Black Friday and Cyber Monday newspaper circulars in one place. The catch is, they don't have a full list of retailers, and that some deals are local and may not be available to you. Use with caution.

<http://slickdeals.net/blackfriday/>

Cyber Monday



Traditionally Cyber Monday was geared to Online purchasing only. This is still mainly true, retailers are offering ONLINE deals only, but they have a hard time just sticking to the MONDAY only claim offering Cyber Deals for a full week starting on SUNDAY after Thanksgiving! Most people have one question? Will the products I'm interested in go on sale during Cyber Monday? The best way to find

out is to go the website of the retail store you're interested in and sign up for their "sale alert" email subscription. Most big box stores like Best Buy, Wal-Mart, Costco, Lowes and others will send you an early preview of Black Friday and Cyber Monday Deals.



The holiday season lasts just over a month, but the debt that people take on often impacts their finances for an entire year. We hope we have been able to show you that with a plan, the proper mindset and a good spirit, you can have a wonderful holiday season without bringing debt into the New Year.



DebtGuru.com is brought to you by the American Credit Foundation, a Non Profit 501C3 organization dedicated to helping consumers manage their finances through smart planning and budgeting. If you should find you have questions, need help or would like to speak to somebody regarding your financial future our certified counselors are always here to help you free of charge.

Here is to your bright and debt free New Year!

DebtGuru Contact Information and Resources

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