



Highlights: Appliance Stores

When it's time to buy a new refrigerator, washer, dryer, dishwasher, or other large appliance, brace yourself: Many buyers find selecting the right appliance, plus getting it delivered and properly installed, to be a time-consuming, aggravating experience. *Washington Consumers' CHECKBOOK*, available at www.checkbook.org, has ratings of local appliance retailers and advice to help consumers get the appliances they want for the lowest price, without headaches. Some of the findings included in CHECKBOOK's report on buying appliances:

- Although general price competition for appliances is less pronounced than for many other products, it's still worth shopping around. By asking stores to bid for their business, CHECKBOOK's mystery shoppers found substantial differences in price among local retailers for the same appliances.
- For example, for an LG LMXS30776S refrigerator in stainless steel, prices ranged from \$3,180 to \$3,695, a difference of \$515. For a Samsung clothes washer (model WA48H7400AW), prices ranged from \$685 to \$1,063, a difference of \$378.
- Use of a consumer-unfriendly policy called "minimum advertised prices" (MAP) squelches retailers' ability to advertise prices lower than set minimums online or in circulars. But MAP policies don't apply to prices quoted to consumers in person, via phone, or via email. Stores, particularly independent ones, often quote prices below MAP to seal a deal. To get the best prices, you should call or email retailers and mention that you're shopping prices at several stores.
- CHECKBOOK found significant differences in the quality of service provided by local appliance retailers. Some stores received "superior" ratings for "advice" by at least 80 percent of their surveyed customers; others received such favorable ratings from fewer than 50 percent.
- Consumers don't have to pay more to get good service. Highly-rated stores were just as likely to quote low prices as their low-rated competitors.

CHECKBOOK's Advice for Appliance Shopping Success

- Choose a retailer carefully, especially if you need help deciding which appliance to purchase. Many local stores, particularly the big chains, were rated quite low for the advice provided by their salespeople. And according to the ratings CHECKBOOK gets from local consumers, the problems persist, with frequent delivery delays and improper and sloppy installation work.
- To make sure you get the best possible price, initiate a competitive bidding process.
- Don't assume sale prices are good prices.
- When comparing prices, consider fees for delivery, hauling away old appliances, and installation.
- Don't assume you'll get low prices by buying from the big chains or even online: CHECKBOOK often found better deals—sometimes MUCH better deals—elsewhere.
- Get all terms of a sale in writing, including the salesperson's name and contact information, appliance brand and model number, prices for each appliance and all delivery and installation charges, as well as the expected delivery date.
- Pay by credit card. If you have a problem, you can protest the charge with your card issuer.
- Skip the extended warranties pushed by most stores. These offers are great deals for the stores that sell them, but awful deals for the customers who buy them.
- If you know your installation will be complicated or unusual, hire a top-rated plumber for the job.

The media may cite selected examples of top-rated appliance stores, as shown in Washington Consumers' CHECKBOOK, and CHECKBOOK's editors are available for interviews. Please contact Jamie Lettis at 202-454-3006 or jlettis@checkbook.org to schedule.