



Highlights: Buying Appliances

Many buyers find selecting the right appliance, plus getting it delivered and properly installed, to be a time-consuming, aggravating experience. *Washington Consumers' Checkbook* (Checkbook.org) has ratings of local appliance retailers and advice—including a foolproof shopping strategy—to help consumers get the appliances they want for the lowest price, without headaches. Highlights from Checkbook's report:

- Although 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 undercover shoppers found substantial differences in price among local retailers for the same appliances.
- For example, prices for a Whirlpool WRX735SDHZ refrigerator in stainless steel was \$2,328; the lowest price was \$1,379—a tidy savings of \$949. For a Maytag MDB4949SHZ dishwasher in stainless steel, prices ranged from \$500 to \$964, a difference of \$464.
- Use of a consumer-unfriendly policy called "minimum advertised price" (MAP) squelches retailers' ability to offer prices lower than set minimums online or in circulars. But MAP policies don't apply to prices quoted directly 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.
- Many local stores, particularly the big chains, get low ratings from their Checkbook-surveyed customers. Customers say they are disappointed by the advice provided by salespeople and complain about delivery delays and improper and sloppy installation.
- Fortunately, several area retailers usually do well by their customers.
- 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 tips for appliance shopping success

- To make sure you get the best possible price, initiate a competitive bidding process.
- *Don't* assume you'll get low prices by buying from the big chains or even online: Checkbook often found lower prices elsewhere.
- Don't assume sale prices are good prices; Checkbook has proven otherwise in its research.
- When comparing prices, consider fees for delivery, hauling away old appliances, and installation.
- Get all terms of a sale in writing, including the store'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 most customers who buy them.
- If you know your installation will be complicated or unusual, hire a top-rated plumber for the job.

Checkbook's editors are available for interviews. Please contact Jamie Lettis at 202-454-3006 or jlettis@checkbook.org to schedule.

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