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Should You Buy New or Used? 40 Recommendations

Should you buy a new or used car; a new or used computer; a new or used boat? Being frugal is all well and good, but sometimes you're better off laying down the cash for new, rather than buying someone else's troubles with a used product.

Here's the thing: A lot of merchandise begins depreciating the moment you buy it, making it pointless to pay an extra \$1,000 or so just to say you were first in line. Our advice? Don't let your fiance con you into paying extra for a diamond ring because she wants jewelry without any history. When it comes to camera equipment, however, you want to avoid purchasing a pig in a poke.

History vs. pig? Here's a list of 40 items and our recommendation on whether you should buy new or used.

1. Bike Helmets - New

A crash usually will only crush the foam inside the helmet casing, which means damage may not be visible. However, helmets are designed to protect against just one accident, so it's a lot safer to buy new before you hop on the bike again.

2. Boats - Used

Buying a new boat rather than a used boat may assure you of fewer problems and typically comes with some type of manufacturer's warranty. On the other hand, boats generally depreciate much faster than automobiles (which is very fast), and some boat owners tend to give up boating quickly, thus sending some nice, lightly-used boats to market at fire-sale prices. In the end, you're better off buying used and saving yourself a bundle.

3. Books - Used

You can buy used books at significant discounts from online sellers and brick-and-mortar used book stores. The condition of the books may vary, but they usually range from good to like-new. Besides, there's something pretty cool about a lived-in book.

4. Camera Lenses - New

An SLR camera lens is the most expensive part of a camera. It also directly affects the quality of your images. Any damage to the lens, however slight, will show up in your photos.

5. Car Seats - New

Even if a used car seat looks OK, damaged car seats aren't uncommon. Safety technology improves every year and new seats cost as little as \$50, so buying new is usually the better option.

6. Cars and Trucks - Used

You've probably heard this before: New cars and trucks depreciate the second you drive them off the dealership's lot. In buying a used car, you save money on both the initial cost and the insurance. It also helps to know a trusty mechanic who can check a vehicle over first. This way, you'll be aware of any potential problems before you make the purchase.

7. Consumer Electronics - Used

Most folks (like guys) prefer shiny new toys, but refurbished electronic goods are a much sweeter deal. Consumer electronics are returned to the manufacturer for different reasons, but generally, they'll be inspected for damaged parts, fixed, tested, then resold at a lower price. Just make sure you get a good warranty along with your purchase. You also might look for deals on floor models, which are basically new but have received a bit of wear while serving as display models.

8. Craft Supplies - Used

Garage sales, craft swaps, thrift shops...there are just too many nifty places for craft supplies. Hunting down unique craft supplies is half the fun. So why buy from a pricey craft shop when you can cut your price by up to 90 percent? If you have leftovers, be sure to donate them to your local schools.

9. Diamonds - Used

As with several previously mentioned products, diamonds drop massively in value once you walk out of the store. Learn the four C's (cut, color, clarity and carat size) of quality diamonds and have your stone or stones evaluated before buying. You can save a great deal of money by purchasing used diamond jewelry or loose diamonds from an individual or online outlet. Just make sure you know what you're buying before you plunk down your cash.

10. DVDs and CDs - Used

Second-hand DVDs and CDs will play like new if they were well taken care of. Even if you wind up with a scratched disc and you don't want to bother with a return, there are ways to remove the scratches and make the DVD or CD playable again. Begin with window cleaner and move on to toothpaste for a smooth play.

11. Exercise Equipment - Used

Give 'em six months after the New Year and those resolutions will have gone to pot (or pot belly.) Hit any garage sale and you can dicker your way to a \$10 set of barbells, Exercycle or even Stairmaster in barely used condition.

12. Ikea Furniture - Used

Why bother assembling your own when you can pick it up for free (or nearly free) on Craigslist and Freecycle? Summer is the best time to hunt for Ikea furniture as that's when college students are changing apartments and tossing out their goodies.

13. Games and Toys - Used

How long do games and toys remain your child's favorite before they're left forgotten under the bed or in a closet? You can find used children's toys in great condition at moving sales or on Craigslist, or you can ask your neighbors, friends, and family to trade used toys. Just make sure to give them a good wash before letting junior play. (One tip: Infant toys should be purchased new to avoid bacterial transfer.)

14. Gardening Tools - Used

You'll frequently see used garden equipment and tools sold at garage and estate sales. They might have a bit of personality and require sharpening, but that sometimes makes them all the better.

15. Hand Tools - Used

Simple tools with few moving parts, like hammers, hoes and wrenches, will keep for decades so long as they are well-made to begin with and well-maintained. These are fairly easy to find at neighborhood yard or garage sales. If you don't need to use hand tools very often, an even better deal is to rent a set of tools or borrow them from a friend.

16. Hats - New

Two words: Lice and dandruff. (I know, technically that's three words, but the "and" doesn't really count.)

17. Home Accents - Used

You could go with cookie-cutter knick-knacks and artwork from Pottery Barn, or you could make your house distinctly unique. Haunt antique shops, thrift stores, flea markets and the like for gems that will stand out and make your friends envious.

18. Jewelry - Used

As with diamonds, depreciation hits quality jewelry hard. Check out estate sales and reputable pawn shops to find great deals on unique pieces.

19. Laptops - New

Because of their portability, laptops are prone to all sorts of abuse and problems. Unless you buy a refurbished laptop, you have no idea what torture it's been subjected to or when it will up and die. You also won't receive a new-computer warranty or tech support that could save your butt the night before a big presentation.

20. Makeup and Beauty Supplies - New

Never, never, never share eye makeup. Bacteria and contagious diseases can accumulate on makeup and beauty supplies. That's not something you want hanging around your sensitive mucous membranes. If you'd like to save a few bucks, consider making your own beauty products.

21. Maternity and Baby Clothes - Used

Compared to everyday outfits you can wear any time, maternity clothes don't get much wear outside the few months of pregnancy. The same goes for baby clothes that are quickly outgrown. You'll save a small fortune by purchasing gently used maternity clothes and baby clothes at yard sales and thrift stores. Hand-me-round maternity clothes are also a good option.

22. Mattresses and Bedding - New

Ecccch! You could be sleeping on other people's mold, mites, bacteria, and bodily fluids. Besides, even the really good mattresses are only supposed to last eight to 10 years, and it's hard to know the actual age of a used mattress. Avoid the whole problem and try something new with a Memory Foam Mattress. You and your body won't regret it.

23. Pets - Used

Buy a pet from a professional breeder or store and it can set you back several hundreds or thousands of dollars. Add on the standard shots and vet bills and you might as well pay for a human child. Instead, adopt a pre-owned pet from your local animal shelter and get a new family member, fees, and vaccines at a substantially lower cost. You'll also avoid supporting the infamous "puppy mills."

24. Pet Supplies - New

Stink, stank, stunk! Old stains, germs and odors continue to ferment, even if pet supplies have been in storage for some time. If you care about cleanliness and your pet's health, buy new.

25. Photographic Light Bulbs - New

We're not talking ordinary light bulbs, although you shouldn't buy these used, either. We're talking about the light bulbs used with photographic equipment. These bulbs can be quite expensive, but their life span is short enough that you likely won't get much use out

of them if you buy second-hand. Plus, they can blow up in you or your model's face. Definitely not a pleasant situation.

26. Pool Table - New

Used pool tables are never flat; the felt is less than smooth; and the entire table is usually marked up with nasty chalk. If you're at all serious about your billiards, invest in a new table and care for it wisely. (Eight ball in the corner pocket.)

27. Safes - Used

Security should be your main concern when buying a safe, but making a used safe safe isn't that expensive. Changing the combination usually requires the services of a professional locksmith or safe technician to do the job right. Even if you bought a new safe, you'd have to occasionally pay for periodic maintenance to keep the lock operating smoothly and avoid the dreaded "failure related lock-out." So invest in a second-hand safe, have the combination changed and pay for a quality locksmith.

28. Shoes - New

Used shoes have already shaped themselves to the previous owner's feet. That means they'll literally rub your foot the wrong way.

29. Software - New

Most software manufacturers require you to register a serial number when activating their product on your computer. Once the serial number on software has already been registered, you can't use it again. (This does not apply to open-source software you download from the Internet free of charge, like Mozilla Firefox.)

If you're purchasing a refurbished computer and the seller says he's including software, don't pay extra for what may be an illegal license. You may have to pay again for software you can actually use -- or download open source that suits your needs.

30. Speakers and Microphones - New

Speakers and microphones are sensitive audio equipment that don't stand up well to blasting and mishandling. Like laptops and cameras, the damage may not be obvious, but their performance would be severely compromised.

31. Sports Equipment - Used

Most people buy sports equipment planning to use it until it drops, but this rarely happens. As a result, much sports equipment ends up on the resale market while still in good condition. Research and, most importantly, check for fit at yard sales or sports equipment stores before buying used sporting gear through Craigslist.

32. Swimsuits - New

Swimsuits are ungodly expensive but they're simply worn too close to the body -- someone else's body -- to consider buying used.

33. Textbooks - Used

Students know this trick. Used textbooks are both cheaper and already have all the pertinent information highlighted. What you may not know is that major booksellers now sell used textbooks. For example, you can use Barnes and Noble free shipping coupons to buy new or used textbooks, then sell them back at the end of the term.

34. Tires - New

Sometimes it's hard to tell if used tires were once part of a totaled wreck. If they've been in an accident, they're bound to be unstable and unreliable. Putting your safety at risk for the sake of saving a few bucks just doesn't add up.

35. Underwear - New

Do we even need to discuss this one? Cleaned, bleached, purified, sanitized...second-hand underwear and socks can never be cheaper than what you'll find on sale or in bulk.

36. Recreational Vehicle - Used

As with other vehicles, RVs depreciate rapidly. People also tend to trade up or down, get tired of the model they've purchased or stop using them altogether. A little patience and education should score you a much better deal than buying new from a dealer. It's important to know your needs before buying, however, so you don't end up as one of those people selling a used RV.

37. Timeshare Property - Used

Most people aren't even aware they can buy timeshare vacation property from a previous owner, rather than the developer, yet you can save up to 75 percent by doing so. The simple truth is that there are far more sellers than buyers in the timeshare industry. This glut drives the price down, a fact developers don't want you to know. Avoid the developers high-pressure tactics and offers of extra amenities and programs that may cost thousands of dollars. Instead, pay only for the property you actually want by going through the owner.

38. Vacuum Cleaners - New

Vacuums get some heavy-duty use and abuse in nearly all households. They also cost more to fix than to purchase new. Oreck vacuums, for example, are well worth the price for their sucking power, plus Oreck free shipping codes make them more affordable. Keep in mind that older models tend to spew more dust than they suck up. So suck up and pay out the cash for a good vacuum. Your nose will thank you.

39. Video Games - Used

Kids get tired of video games fairly quickly. You can find used video games from online sellers at sites like Amazon and eBay a few months after the release date. Most video game store outlets feature a used game shelf, as well. And if you're not the patient type, you can rent or borrow from a friend first to see if it's worth the purchase.

40. Wetsuits - New

Over time, wetsuits lose elasticity and the ability to keep you warm. The constant change in water pressure as you dive will eventually wear out the wet suit and make it more likely to tear. Go for new to stay warm and well insulated against the elements.