

Fixed for the Holidays

A holiday guide to buying repaired or refurbished electronics with confidence they will last.

Why Shop Refurbished?

Black Friday prices year-round: You can usually find great deals on used electronics, getting something that's like-new, but for a sizable discount. Technically, the minute you open a new device, it becomes used, so the difference between a used and new item can be negligible. You can get an item that's close to new at prices lower than Black Friday deals.

Buying used is a greener choice: Buying used gifts is better for the environment. Most of the environmental damage from our electronics comes from the manufacturing process.

4 tips on what makes a good refurbished gift

1) High-quality items tend to make better refurbished gifts. Unfortunately, not all electronics are made to last very long -- and while you should always look for durable items to avoid waste, this is especially true when shopping refurbished. Things designed to last usually cost a little more upfront, but provide big savings over time.

2) The manufacturer has a track record of durability and repairability. It's hard to know how long an item will last if it's a relatively new product. One way is to check the track record of the brand. [Consumer Reports tracks this data](#) for electronics and [appliances](#), and members can look up information there. You should also check iFixit's repairability scores for [phones](#), [laptops](#) and [tablets](#). The easier an item is to repair, the more likely it will last.

3) Know what you want before your shop. When you've done a little homework, and you know the make and model of the item you want, it takes a lot of the guesswork out of buying refurbished. Otherwise, the number of similar items can be overwhelming.

4) Be wary of these items:

- [Televisions and computer monitors](#) have a track record of problems, given their bulk and fragility. This is especially true if you need the item delivered to you.
- [Wearable devices](#) such as smart watches and headphones tend to wear down where they touch your skin. If you do choose one of these items, check to see if they replace the part of the product that touches the body.
- [Printers](#). Typically, printers wear down as they use ink and toner, which builds up inside. Refurbishers rarely clean out all that ink.

- Items with impossible to replace batteries. Manufacturers sometimes glue batteries into devices such as tablets, making replacing those batteries nearly impossible.

Where to shop refurbished electronics

Because buying used increases your risk, who you buy from is critical. If you encounter problem, does this vendor risk its reputation if it doesn't help you?

Direct from the original manufacturer. Original equipment manufacturers are a reliable source of refurbished products, though also the most expensive. Not all manufacturer refurbishment programs are created equal in terms of what they check and how long they warranty the product, so it's important to look at our tips below. Some manufacturers actively block other technicians from access to parts and service information required to properly service their products. While that means original manufacturers have the most reliably-repaired versions of their own products, it also means they can charge you whatever they want for any [future repairs](#).

Big retailers with established used electronics programs:

Amazon. Amazon allows a variety of suppliers to use their refurbished and certified pre-owned [marketplace](#) (except, that is, if those suppliers want to sell [repaired Apple products](#)). They come with a minimum 90-day supplier-backed warranty and a 30-day return policy and Amazon has the largest selection.

Best Buy. You can buy a range of used products through the Best Buy Outlet, and they come in different categories -- [Open-Box, Refurbished and Pre-Owned](#). Shopping through this tool can be somewhat complicated as the warranties and quality vary, but it has a large selection and carries Best Buy's return and exchange [promise](#).

Walmart. Walmart has been expanding its [Certified Refurbished Electronics](#) and also offers a 90-day minimum warranty. While Walmart has a smaller selection than Amazon and Best Buy, it can have bigger discounts.

Other retailers:

Gazelle.com. [Gazelle](#) buys and resells used electronics from users and from mobile carriers, and has a wide selection of phones, tablets and laptops. All devices are inspected, but you are limited to a 30-day return policy.

[New Egg](#). New Egg has a very wide selection of computer products, and also a [refurbished marketplace](#). Especially for computers, New Egg often carries a factory warranty, but this varies by product. It also has a holiday return policy for items returned by the end of January.

4 tips to help you shop refurbished

1) Check to ensure the process of refurbishing is thorough. Terms such as “Like-New,” “Open-Box,” “Refurbished,” or “Certified Pre-Owned” can mean very different things. Some vendors claim that an item is refurbished, when all they have done is make sure it turns on and wipe it clean(ish) with a cloth. If the seller doesn’t know -- or can’t be specific -- about the process to make sure the item has been thoroughly checked, then you should have a lot less confidence that the item will last.

2) Find out about accessories. Items that, when new, come with earphones, connecting cables and charging stations, don’t always come with those important accessories when used. You should check to see what you are getting, and whether you will need to purchase other accessories. The fewer the accessories, the more of a discount you should expect.

3) How to know you are getting a good price.

- Make sure you know when the model came out. In addition to how old the device is, you should check when the specific model debuted. Prices for refurbished items are mostly set by the debut of the product, and not how long those specific items were in use. This matters less with devices that don’t require a lot of software updates, such as cameras; but with a device such as a tablet, the older the device, the more issues it may have with running the latest software.
- Generally speaking, the cost for a reliable, certified pre-owned piece of equipment is usually about 15-20% less than buying new, plus 10% per year since the original sale. So, a three year old tablet might be about half the price of that same tablet new.
- Comparison shop, and don’t automatically choose the cheapest option.. If you find one merchant selling the same item at a *much* lower cost, there is probably more risk.

4) Get protection -- warranty, returns or purchase insurance. First you should get a sense of the return policy, and what the terms are. Most sellers will give you 30 days to return, but some give you just a couple of weeks, meaning you have to flag defective products very quickly. In addition to a good return policy, you want at least a 90-day warranty in case the item needs service. Paying with some credit cards will [extend your warranty](#) and give you additional purchase protection. Getting additional protection is a good way to enjoy the cost savings without the risk. Your credit card company can also help get your money back if the seller won’t accept a return.

4 last tips before you give

1) Check the item ASAP, before you wrap. The less time between buying a product and you testing it thoroughly, the better. It's much easier to get your money back for a defective product if you flag problems right away, and it's harder for the seller to claim it was your fault. If the device has a camera, check the lens for scratches and take a test picture. If the seller doesn't cooperate when you flag issues, try contesting the charge with your credit card company, which can often get your money back.

2) Use customer service to your advantage. If you buy online with a vendor such as Amazon, use the online chat feature to give feedback on the purchase. A lot of customers find they can get issues addressed quickly by flagging problems this way.

3) Plan to rewrap. Sometimes when you buy refurbished, the original box is damaged or missing. If you are giving the item as a gift, you might want to put some care into making sure it looks nice when you give it.

4) Don't toss the old electronics! If you are upgrading electronics, your older devices could still be working. Read more about how you can sell, donate or recycle those used items by checking our U.S. PIRG blog [here](#).

[U.S. PIRG Education Fund](#) is an independent, non-partisan group that works for consumers and the public interest. Through research, public education and outreach, we serve as counterweights to the influence of powerful special interests that threaten our health, safety or well-being.