

Internet Interpet

In order to save on Internet purchases, you need to know the equivalent price at local retail and also how freight or service charges add costs.



I'm the type of person who buys most of his canned or bottled groceries, soft drinks and cleaning supplies online from Coles or Woolworths. It saves time; I don't have to load items into a trolley, onto a conveyor, in the trolley again to load into the car and then into the house. Nor do I have to drive, find a parking spot, trudge through aisles and wait in queue at checkout. I can shop for specials without standing in front of racks, and for a small fee they're delivered. My groceries come to my house when I want them, no matter what the weather, and they are only handled once.

It's the same with music. Even though I have collected close to 3000 CDs and 5000 vinyl albums in my life, I now buy 99% of my music online from iTunes in the US, which has a greater variety than the Australian site and is far cheaper. Plus there are no plastic cases, no wrappers and no discs to get scratched or lose.

But when it comes to pet products, I'm divided. I like to go into a store and see what's new and examine the items for durability and worthiness before purchasing and bringing them home. I like dealing with the people at the four pet stores I frequent, where I can often find bargains or even haggle in a friendly way. When it comes to those 30-kilo bags of super-premium food, I can't get them from a supermarket and they'd cost a lot to have delivered as just one item.

But the beauty of shopping online is that you can often find discounted items if you know what you are shopping for. You may find things that your local pet shop doesn't stock, like new items introduced overseas and not yet distributed here, and the amount of information on individual products can far exceed what the normal pet shop staff would know.

The disadvantages of trying to source product on the Net are that you don't get that friendly service, you may not know where you're shopping or how secure it is, and there can be delivery or stock problems. You can't read the use-by date nor can you see much more than a small image, so you're unable to read the label or shake, handle or poke the product.

You can tell how product is stored in a small pet store or warehouse. Pet food, for example, can degrade quickly in hot conditions, losing nutrients, especially vitamins A and D, as well as the fat or oil content turning rancid. And, of course, with your local store it's easy to return something if there is a problem, but this is not so straightforward when expecting a refund from a company that may be anywhere.

If you go to the big US superstore sites and online retailers, they may display several thousand products at seemingly bargain prices, but they often don't ship overseas. And, of course, the conversion rate if they do ship overseas, plus shipping costs, would make the transaction costly. That parrot toy you were looking at in August cost only \$10.06 then, but three months later it's a whopping \$16.60 just because of the change in the Aussie dollar, plus fairly hefty shipping charges.

You can have the best of both worlds by doing your research online as to what you might want and getting your local pet shop to order it in. By checking out US sites like Drs Foster and Smith (www.drsfostersmith.com), which is online-only, or the two largest retail chains, Petco (Petco.com) or PetSmart (www.petsmart.com), you can view more than 10,000 high-quality pet-related products. These sites have doctors who answer questions and help you along with your pet, as well as having a lot of advice and information online.

MUTTSPACE

A PLACE FOR MUTTS & THEIR WELL-BRED FRIENDS



BLANKETS & BEDDING



COOL STUFF



TRAINING AIDS

SPECIAL OFFER TO URBAN READERS.

USE THIS CODE "UA172008" AT CHECKOUT FOR 10% OFF ALL SHOP ITEMS (EXCLUDES SHIPPING COSTS).

ONLINE STORE & ONLINE COMMUNITY SITE NOW ONLINE: WWW.MUTTSPACE.COM.AU

But with the exception of Petco, which partners with iShopUSA to fulfil international orders through credit cards, direct deposit and PayPal, the others do not ship to Australia and you'll find that the case with most foreign online stores. Food and treats can't be shipped here, nor can medical supplies, flea and tick treatments and many pet health foods. But back to our local scene.

We have all had loyalty to our neighbourhood shops, boutique stores and familiar brands. Some of us shop at warehouse or barn operations while others are content to browse the pet aisles at Big W's instore pet centres or at other department stores. But by the nature of their shop size and limited hours, rent, staff and other expenses, they often can't compete with online stores that are open 24/7, don't have to worry about main-street rent, staff, floor space and inventory levels and don't have to physically display all of the pet supplies they are selling. The benefit to the consumer may be lower costs, but not always, as many pet supply sites also sell at RRP or list prices.

In addition to convenience, purchasing pet supplies online can save pet owners money. With the increase in petrol prices, many shoppers are finding it too expensive to drive to their local pet store. This problem is being especially felt in country areas where a large number of pet owners are located. Many cities have a pet store; however, not all towns do. This may mean that a pet owner living in a rural area could be driving half an hour or more to their local pet store, which is a fair whack of money in petrol.

This is one reason why online pet supply operators are experiencing a boom in sales, especially from rural or interstate customers. There are many shoppers who are successful at finding online pet stores that offer free or reduced-price shipping on all of their pet supplies. Some sites do shipping deals which I've observed to be freight-free on any order over a certain amount to any major city (usually \$75-\$100 or more) or diminishing rates by the kilo on larger purchases.

Internet sites can offer discounts such as a comparison I did in just five minutes while writing this story. I called my local large retailer asking price and availability of an 18-kilo Science Diet Active Dog formula and a 16-kilo Eukanuba Labrador Retriever pack. The Science Diet was \$129.95 in-store compared to \$109.90 at one online site. The Eukanuba was \$99.90 online with a free toy pack while the big pet store had it at \$115 but with only free pet biscuits.

But, to be fair, the other major store in my neighbourhood gives me a discount of 10-15% since I'm a frequent buyer, and the store that has the higher prices above will discount if asked and if you offer to pay in cash rather than credit card.

In order to save on Internet purchases, you need to know the equivalent price at local retail and also how freight or service charges add costs. I'd also advise you check the use-by date at your local store with a call rather than email the online seller for their minimum guaranteed use-by date on the same item at that time.

If they don't detail their refund policy on their site, find out what it is and also whether you would pay for shipping back an unused portion. If you plan to use a credit card, check that you are ordering from a secure site -not sending an email with credit card details or entering information on a form that is not secure.

Be sure to look for the little lock icon on the bottom of your web browser to make sure that your personal information will be protected by secure encryption when it is sent over the Internet. You can also check on this by holding your cursor over the web page in question, clicking the right button on your mouse, and selecting 'Properties', then looking to see that the web address shown starts with 'https', where the 's' denotes a secure web server.

Dogs
are a girl's best friend...

Top Tag Pet ID is your dog's!

A pet ID that knows your DOG as well as you.

www.petswayhome.com

The School of Thought

There is one other caveat for consumers when it comes to purchasing non-prescription medications such as flea and tick treatment, worming tablets or blocks and even nutraceuticals - food supplements that have health benefits in addition to nutritional values such as chondroitin, glucosamine, vitamins or other herbal remedies. For example, some tick remedies made for dogs can be fatal if given to cats. And you must also know the correct amount and how to administer based on weight, age and other factors. We always suggest you consult with your vet on this.

Always make sure you are ordering from a company in Australia that can advise you correctly on dosage, administration and what not to do as well as making sure that your medication is made for Australian conditions. Though it's rare here, in the US the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has found companies that sell unapproved pet drugs and counterfeit pet products, make fraudulent claims, dispense prescription drugs without requiring a prescription, and sell expired drugs. Pet owners who purchase drugs from these companies may think they are saving money, but in reality they may be short-changing their pet's health and putting its life at risk.

The Australian Veterinary Association President, Dr Mark Lawrie, explains, "The AVA recommends pet owners get advice from their vet or vet nurse when buying any drugs or other treatments for their pets to reduce the significant risk some chemicals can create.

"Even some everyday products like flea and tick treatment contain powerful chemicals. Always follow the instructions and talk to your vet if you are unsure about any aspect of caring for your pet.

"On the issue of counterfeit drugs ordered online, we recommend caution when ordering from an unknown source - do you want melamine in your glucosamine?"

"All too often vets see the results of the wrong chemicals being given to pets. It's a heartbreaking process treating an animal that has been accidentally poisoned by its owner who may have just been trying to save some money."

Just as you're choosy in picking your pet store, should you decide to use the Net for any purchases you'll need to be cautious and do your research. For most people, the local store is quite suitable, but for those who are time-poor and need a service, the Web can offer a solution.



No more traffic, no more finding a parking space, no more queues, no more carrying to your car
All your dog and cat supplies delivered to your door by Fastway couriers for just \$5, NO LIMIT!

\$5 SYDNEY COASTER DELIVERY CHECK HOW FAR WE'LL GO TO REACH YOU

Visit us at www.petsforce.com

All these famous brands and a lot more -



Personal shoppers can still visit our shop at - 61 East Parade Sutherland NSW 2232 - Phone: 9545 0122 - Email: ask_liz@petsforce.com.au