

ONLINE SHOPPING. Nothing but net. A tactical guide to help you browse the world, beat the crowds and click your way to the coolest styles

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"Turn on, tune in and check out" has become the mantra of the merchandise-amassing millions who flock daily to the Internet to buy an assortment of things that would make even Timothy Leary scratch his drug-addled noggin.

We buy music over the ether, try on clothes from across the globe and pick pizza with our PDAs. According to a Nielsen survey, more than 875 million people worldwide have shopped online -- a 40% increase in just two years. Here in the U.S., online retail is even defying the gloomy economic forecast, with cyber sales expected to rise 17% this year to \$204 billion -- and apparel leading all categories at \$26.6 billion, according to Forrester Research.

With the information superhighway on its way to becoming as crowded as the 405 at drive time, even the savviest shopper needs to know how to compete. So, to help you beat the masses to the merchandise, we've gathered a few tips about when to wake up, how misspellings can help and why not to pay for expedited shipping. Below, some pointers from online apparel e-tailers we frequently visit.

Gilt Groupe

www.gilt.com

The best way to score those deeply discounted Dolce & Gabbana pumps or that John Varvatos jacket when you're battling it out at this 36-hour, members-only online sample sale, with goods up to 75% off, is to get on board early. To help with that, sign up to receive text message alerts to your cellphone right before sales start at 9 a.m. PDT and click the "Add to Calendar" link, which allows you to add the sale date to the calendar program on your computer.

If you're not quick on the draw and the item you want has already sold out or is languishing in another's shopping cart, you can click the "waitlist" button. If another shopper gets cold feet -- or if Gilt gets more inventory after the sale has ended -- you will be alerted by e-mail or text message.