



Learn 10 Secrets to Shopping at the Apple Store

Description

So, you're closing the window on Windows and taking the Apple plunge. Congratulations. We've been aboard the Apple cart since the late-1980s and welcome all newbies.



The simplest way to get started is to place an order on Apple.com for your new iMac, iPad, iPhone, or iWhatever. But Apple products are pricey, so, naturally, you want to try them before you buy.

These days, you have a more comprehensive array of brick-and-mortar stores where you can check out and purchase Apple products, from electronics giant Best Buy to warehouse clubs Costco and

BJ's. Our advice, however, is to go straight to the source: the Apple Store in your local mall, downtown space, or upscale shopping center. Here are ten good reasons why.

Employees Don't Work on Commission.

Enter an Apple Store, and an iPad-armed employee will usually intercept you. You'll be asked what brings you to the store, and your first name will be punched into the iPad to await the second intercept of an Apple "specialist." Though there are many around – you can tell by the sport shirts – you may wait a few minutes for help, as I did on a recent weekday morning. That's the downside. The upside: Your patience will be rewarded by the arrival of a knowledgeable guide to all things Apple.

The Apple Store hiring process is challenging and the training intense, insiders have told me over the years. As a result, "I don't know" isn't an acceptable answer to customer questions. And there are no high-pressure sales. Ask, and they'll tell you: They aren't working on commission, so you're free to walk away without being shamed. Besides, there's usually another customer waiting to take your place. Trust me: You aren't going to get that kind of deep knowledge at Best Buy, and there's no one to tell you anything about Apple products at the warehouse clubs.

They'll Help With Online Orders.

Configuring, say, a new MacBook Pro laptop online can be daunting. It would be best to make decisions about screen size, processing speed, storage, and even color (we're fans of Space Gray). But, again, the Apple Store can help.

Even if you enter an Apple Store planning to walk out with a souped-up MacBook, you won't. The laptop will need to be customized and shipped from elsewhere. What the store specialist will do is take you through the steps to order it from Apple.com, helpfully explaining the difference between gigabytes and gigahertz along the way. You can then choose to have the laptop shipped to the store – see the next tip for why you should choose this option – or your home.

They'll Help Transfer Your Files, Too.

All those photos of the kids. All of that music and video. All of those documents and files. You want them off your old device and on to your new one. Apple Store employees won't do all of the work for you, but they will help.

If you ordered a new laptop, have it shipped to the Apple Store. When it arrives, take your old laptop with you to the store. Ideally, you'll also bring along the external drive you've used to back up your files. Ask an employee to help you migrate that data in the store. You'll be able to access anything stored in the iCloud later, once your new machine is up and running.

They'll Match Competitors' Prices.

The old saw that there's never a sale at the Apple Store isn't true anymore. However, now that other retailers are selling Apple products – a relatively new phenomenon – there's some undercutting.

Tell an Apple specialist if you want to buy your Apple product from an Apple Store but see a lower price at a traditional retailer such as Best Buy, Target, or Walmart. An Apple Store employee confirmed that they could get authorization to verify and match another store's price. However, there's a caveat: They won't compare prices from warehouse clubs.

You Can Return Online Orders to a Store

Apple's return policy isn't exceptionally generous. Typically, you have just 14 days to return an item for a refund or exchange from the date you received it. That time frame is about on par with fellow electronics retailer Best Buy, but it's a far cry from what's offered by retailers with the best return policies.

On a positive note, orders from Apple.com can be returned to an Apple Store, saving the hassle of shipping the return yourself. You can also exchange an item in an Apple Store, though it's a good idea to check if the location has what you want in stock. Apple products purchased from another retailer need to be returned to that retailer.

You Need to Go Online to Find Refurbished Items

Apple Store veterans to this day talk about a workaround to that grimace when you once again realize you're paying Tesla-like prices for a new Apple device. Back in the day, you could walk up to the checkout counter – there used to be such – and ask an employee, with a wink and a knowing nod, if they had any returns or refurbished products in the back. (I once got a significant discount on an iPod that had been returned the same day it was purchased.)

No more. "We don't sell refurbished [products] in the store," an Apple specialist confirmed to me recently. Not in the back, anyway. But Apple.com does sell certified refurbished products. And remember, "refurbished" doesn't necessarily mean "repaired." So you could be getting a Mac that was an open-box item or a return. And here's the kicker: The refurb comes with the same one-year limited warranty as Apple's new products.

You Don't Need to Purchase AppleCare on the Spot.

Some people are squeamish about computer malfunctions (like the '90s or something) and dive right into buying extended warranties. Apple's case, AppleCare or AppleCare+ extended warranties provide two additional years of limited warranty service (including phone support). The price tag for AppleCare on a MacBook Pro: \$249. Ouch

If you're that person, wait. That one-year limited warranty thing that comes included with the device at no extra charge? It's solid. If you're still squeamish nearly a year into ownership (or you've had issues), consider purchasing extended coverage then. Apple will gladly sell you the comprehensive coverage later, as long as you are still within the coverage window offered by the original one-year limited warranty.

The Genius Bar Takes Reservations

Warranty or no warranty, the Apple Store's Genius Bar is where customers go to get help when they have questions about how to operate an Apple device, or, worse if there's a problem with it. The certified Geniuses on duty can't fix everything on the spot, but you'll usually at least get a free 10-minute consultation. You can randomly walk in and sign up with the iPad-carrying greeter to see a Genius. However, it's better to book ahead online or by phone to avoid a long wait.

By the way, Apple Stores also offer free workshops on everything from Apple Watch Basics to iPhone Videography. Sign up in advance.

You Can Trade In an Older Device for a Gift Card

Apple's big into recycling, and you might even make a buck in the form of an Apple Store gift card on your outdated Apple device when you're ready to get rid of it. (A store employee can walk you through the steps to erase the data on your device, too). And even if Apple won't compensate you for, say, the non-functioning iPod you found in the back of your closet, its Renew program does promise to recycle the gadget responsibly.

Apple is most interested in later-generation notebooks, iPads, iPhones (4s models and newer), and the like. So, for example, based on the particulars about my iPhone 6s, I could get a \$300 Apple Store gift card for it – which is a good thing because I think I still owe \$300 on it, but then, I wouldn't have a phone.

The Cash Register Is Hidden

You won't see a traditional cash register on the counter at an Apple Store. It exists, but it's tucked away out of sight. Instead, an employee will swipe your credit card in a handheld reader and email the receipt. Quick and easy. You can also pay with Apple Pay, an Apple Store gift card, or cash (if you just robbed a bank).

Need a paper receipt? Your salesperson will reach under the table and grab it seemingly out of thin air. That's the Apple experience.

Category

1. Lifestyle

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