

Great Groupon gifts for Christmas

By Vincent Musial

While most Calgarians are hitting the malls as usual this holiday season, some are choosing to make this a Groupon Christmas.

Groupon is a website that works by giving people discounted items while at the same time providing companies with business.

“It’s cool because they have a lot of different deals, and they’re pretty good savings,” says Josh Wynman, a third-year millwright at SAIT.

The array of deals on the site discounts the original price by 40-50 per cent and ranges from spa dates

to computer tablets to an assortment of items which can be purchased with credits.

The site makes the joy of giving easier. With one click, a printable email voucher is sent and recipients won’t end up with a lump of coal in their stocking.

Groupon features a selection of new deals every day, last minute shoppers will be able to procrastinate for that special someone.

The coupon company sees the process as being a plus for both shoppers and retailers.

“I believe it helps those on a global and local scale. We coexist with other businesses,” says Julie

Mossler, a representative of Groupon.

Shops around Calgary negotiate deals through the Groupon website in order to gain exposure and promote themselves to their clientele.

Groupon uses a safe method to transfer funds from a credit card.

“We take our customer service very seriously. We want to do all we can to ensure using Groupon is a pleasurable experience,” says Mossler.

“You can even cancel your Groupon within the first 24 hours of purchase, just in case something comes up.”

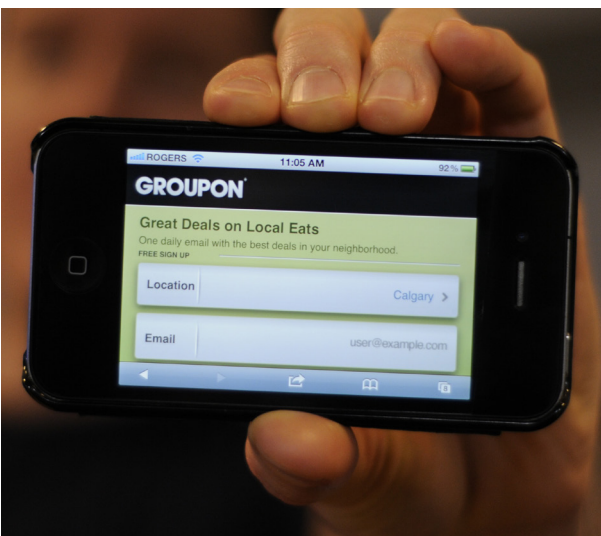


Photo by Vincent Musial

Groupon apps are even available for mobile devices like the iPhone.

Financial savings for the savvy student

By: Megan Mahoney

With the holidays upon us, A are flooding the malls in search of the perfect gifts for family and friends.

For post secondary students, this can be an exceptionally stressful time of year, especially with all of the final projects and exams coming up.

Jessica McAllister is a fourth year nursing student who finds Christmas to be more doom and gloom than a time to celebrate.

“I literally do not have any time until after all of my exams are finished to

even think about purchasing Christmas gifts,” said McAllister.

Christmas is also a very expensive time of year and students in particular may find it difficult to save enough money to buy gifts.

Brianna Hansma, a business student who works part time, wishes she could find the time to go shopping.

“If you are a student, and you have a credit card, you might want to consider shopping online at reputable places because it is a huge time saver,” said Hansma.

So here are a few alternatives to the conventional method of

Christmas shopping as well as some helpful tips to save money this Christmas:

Open up a TFSA (Tax Free Savings Account) with your bank. The government allows each person to save up to \$5000 a year tax free, so this is a great way to put money aside for later.

Online shopping in order to compare deals. Online shopping has been frowned upon in the past, as many view it as unsafe, but choosing websites that have security features can be an efficient and effective way to save time and money.

Try making your own

Christmas cards and baking cookies. It may sound corny but many people appreciate homemade gifts as it shows you spent time and put in effort in order to make the presents.

Bring your own lunch and coffee to school. The average student spends approximately \$10 a day on food and caffeine. This cost can be drastically reduced by simply planning ahead.

Save all of your change and put it in a jar at home. All of that change can add up, and may even be enough to cover your Christmas shopping.

If you drive to school

every day, consider taking transit. Public transit can be frustrating at times but it is a very efficient way to cut back on fuel costs.

Cut back on the boozing and spend more time at home. Students spend a great deal of their money on entertainment and partying.

By simply reducing your alcohol consumption and by staying home more frequently, it will be easier to save up for Christmas gifts.

Hopefully these tips will help you save money this year and find a way to make the holidays special even on a tight budget.

Stuff the stockings with care

By Brittany McEachern

Little things can mean a lot at Christmas.

Stocking stuffers are an old holiday tradition. The origin of filling stockings is unknown, but there are many variations of the legend of how this tradition came about.

“We always got a Mandarin orange. I remember it was always in the toe of the sock. It was a special treat because we never had Mandarin oranges except for Christmas morning,” says Chris Mahoney.

Stocking stuffers can be a real special memory for children and the young at heart.

Memories of running

down the stairs on Christmas morning to see the tree piled high with presents and socks full of little wrapped gifts of all shapes and sizes tend to make the day all the more special.

Stocking stuffers are generally little trinket like gifts. For children little toys and candy are a big hit.

“It’s cheap. Its stuff kids are into,” says Karis Waterfield.

For an older crowd, funky underwear, or cheap electronics are common stocking items.

“For people age 18 and up I usually get them lottery tickets,” says Mahoney.

Lotto tickets and tooth brushes are great, but for the kids at heart candy and

chocolate are things that no one really grows out of.

The worst stocking stuffers are things to do with hygiene. “Who wants hygiene stuff in their stocking? Not me,” says Kathryn Abraham.

Buying stocking stuffers is not always easy but it’s a great time to really think about the person you are buying for.

These items should be a reflection of the person’s personality, and even though stocking stuffers tend to be small items, they can really make a person happy just knowing that someone took the time to think about the little things he or she would appreciate.



Photo by Brittany McEachern

Small, creative gifts are perfect gifts to slip in a stocking, on Christmas Eve.

Zoolights back again for Xmas

By Patricia Riley

Walking through a festive display of Christmas lights, while all bundled up and sipping hot chocolate at the zoo has become a popular holiday tradition for many Calgarians.

This year, Zoolights, which is sponsored by Enmax, will be open from Nov. 25 to Jan. 7, from 6 to 9 p.m. nightly.

Lory Ros, the guest relations manager for the zoo, says Zoolights is almost always busy, depending on the weather of course.

“If it’s really cold than we’re not busy, people would rather stay inside,” says Ros.

People, particularly couples, love Zoolights for its festive atmosphere, she says.

“Sometimes people even have gift exchanges here,” says Ros.

Calgarian Meghan Paul, 19, says she attends every year, even though for her, it’s always the same.

“I love it, but sometimes I wish they had more lights than they already do. Either way, it’s a fun time,” says Paul.

Vanessa Friesen, 30, says she and her husband just love Zoolights.



Photo by Patricia Riley

A festive display of lights at the Calgary Zoo in honour of the Christmas season.

“From the Christmas carolers to the fire pits, it’s so festive,” says Friesen.

Friesen and her husband are planning on making the Calgary Zoolights an annual tradition for their four month old son, Roman.

“They do an awesome set up every year, we can’t wait to go,” she says.

This year, Zoolights

will feature two new light exhibits: CandyLand and an Ode to Canada.

Other highlights include ice carving demonstrations performed by Frozen Memories every Friday and Saturday night, different kinds of “Wishing Trees” and the chance to write one’s own wish and hang it on the Zoo’s own Wishing Tree, and

Friday and Saturday night performances by local choirs.

Food bank donations are accepted during Zoolights, and people are encouraged to donate non-perishable food items.

There also are special events, such as Zoo Year’s Eve, featuring fireworks, entertainment, lights, and the famous traditional countdown

just before midnight.

Tickets for Zoo Year’s Eve must be pre-purchased. They are \$12 for general admission, which includes parking, and \$9 for children.

Regular admission is \$10 plus GST for adults, and \$7 for kids, with tickets available at the gate. Zoolights is open each night except Christmas Eve.

Cracking the password code

By Max Stephen

Hands up, everyone who has used ‘password’ as the password to an account on their computer? No?

How about ‘123456?’ Or ‘12345678?’

Well, some of you have been. Those are three of the most common passwords employed by computer users to access their online accounts and software, according to Splash ID, a U.S. based Internet security firm.

People have been using these as default passwords either because they couldn’t think of a unique way of protecting their information or simply couldn’t be bothered to change an old password.

‘Qwerty,’ the first six letters on the top row of a computer keyboard, and ‘abc123’ also made the top five most

common passwords, Splash ID revealed in a news release.

Using passwords that are short combinations of simple words and numbers may be easier to remember than a lengthy complicated password.

But such simple combinations also makes

it easy for cyber criminals to gain access to important information stored on personal computers.

“Length is more important than silly characters,” says Tim Williams, an ICT instructor at SAIT Polytechnic.

Identity theft is a huge

problem across the world that can devastate a person’s credit score and quality of life.

Some people figure they are being clever when they substitute the “O” in “password” for a zero so it looks like ‘passw0rd.’

But the truth is that this is

“I used to use password as my password but then I got more crafty”

one of the first combinations a cyber criminal would try to use.

Computers can create passwords at an astounding rate of speed and will be far more successful at substituting O’s and zeros when trying to access your info.

This makes symbols as a way of protection almost obsolete, so you are by far better off having a longer password that is easy to remember.

“I used to use password as my password but then I got more crafty,” says Karie Whitmer in an interview at the Odyssey cafe

If you have any of thewse as your current password, you should be seriously brainstorming a new and unique password to protect your information.