



THE SUNDAY TIMES

Five ways the web can save you £2,000

As inflation bites, savvy shoppers are starting to turn to members-only and cost-sharing sites, writes Alexandra Goss

CONSUMERS are feeling the pinch after inflation soared higher than expected last month — but there are ways to counter the trend, the best of which is to go online.

New concepts such as “flash sales” and member-only discounts are helping many people to beat rising costs. We show how you can save.

1 MEMBER-ONLY SITES

A new breed of member-only sites is harnessing the power of “social purchasing”, where people team up via their social networks to bulk-buy goods.

The latest is keynoir.com, which features bargains on travel, food, retail and entertainment. The site, from the founders of Kelkoo, the shopping comparison tool, offers only London-based deals at present but aims to expand to the rest of the UK and Europe by the end of the year.

There is one “Keypass” offer a day and Keynoir encourages members to promote it to friends, colleagues and family members to achieve a minimum number of purchases — the “tipping point” — to make the deal active. At this point, you are guaranteed to receive the deal at the advertised price.

The site sends you the Keypass by post or email and you can then make a booking.

Michal Bohanes, 31, a strategic partner manager for Google, used Keynoir to get a discount of almost 50% at the Michelin-starred Tom Aikens restaurant in Chelsea. The voucher gives Bohanes, from nearby Pimlico, a meal worth £150 for £79, which he will use to take out girlfriend Marta Brio, 25, a hotel sales manager.

2 FLASH SALES

A twist on the member-only sites are those that offer flash sales, allowing consumers to make big savings — but only if they act fast.

Achica.com is a private member site launched in February. It is free to join and offers discounts of up to 70% on homeware, garden and beauty brands such as Bodum, Spear & Jackson and Elizabeth Arden.

Sales are held by brand and take place three times a week — on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays — with each lasting for 48 hours. Members receive emails prior to the sales with full details of what is on offer.

Deals last week included a Peter Smith garden furniture set for £149 — a saving of £110, although you would have to pay an additional £19.95 for shipping.

3 UNLIMITED CASHBACK

Utility Warehouse, a members site offering discounts on utilities, has launched a pre-pay card, which offers 5% cashback every time you spend at participating retailers, including Sainsbury's, Halfords and Topshop.

There's no limit to the amount you can put on the card, or to the cashback you can earn. You pay a one-off application fee of £9.99 and a £1 monthly charge after the first six months. There is also a 35p loading charge for each top up.

Figures from moneysupermarket.com, the comparison site, show that the offer beats the leading cashback credit card, the American Express Platinum. This offers 5% cashback for the first three months up to a maximum of £100. After that, the cashback

rate reverts to 1.25% but only if you spend at least £7,501 in the next nine months.

Based on a £1,000 spend each month, this would leave you with potential cashback of £198.75 — compared with £579.81 from the Utility Warehouse card.

4 AIRMILES FOR TRAINS

Mytrainticket.co.uk was launched last week and boasts a partnership with Airmiles, the flights reward scheme, whereby rail passengers can collect a mile for every £10 they spend on train tickets.

The airmiles can be used for flights,

Eurostar journeys, hotels, tour operator holidays, car hire and days out in Britain.

Mytrainticket shows all available advance, off-peak and anytime fares on one page and allows users to add a London Travelcard or Plusbus ticket for unlimited bus and tram travel in more than 275 UK towns and cities to their purchase.

5 RENTAL SITES

Average petrol prices soared to a record high of 120p a litre this month but drivers are fighting back by clubbing together to share journeys.

Liftshare.com already has more than 364,000 users, some of whom say they have saved up to £2,000 in petrol costs by pooling car journeys. The site is free to join and you simply upload your route to find someone travelling your way — whether it be by car, motorbike or taxi. Liftshare set up its own Twitter feed to help people get home after last week's air travel chaos.

Cash-strapped homeowners are also helping to make ends meet by letting a spare room, bed or sofa to tourists and business travellers. Crashpadder.com is free to use and allows homeowners and tenants to offer up their spare room or second home as a “pop-up hotel”. It has registered hosts in more than 750 cities.

You register, add a description of the room and quote the price and your preferred payment method. People looking for properties to rent must register their details and can then start searching for a match.