



Living Better

## How to score a cross-border deal with the high dollar

Our new guide to your life: this week, how to buy smart from U.S. e-tailers

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### 1. Ship smartly

Use the United States Postal Service to avoid exorbitant brokerage fees for clearing customs. Bob King, who runs the cross-border shopping blog Better Dollar, said he once purchased a \$105 photography accessory on eBay and had it shipped through FedEx, which slapped on a \$29 brokerage fee. For standard shipping, private couriers determine the fee based on the item's value, but if you ship through the United States Postal Service, you'll only have to pay a flat rate of \$5, or \$8 for expedited packages.

But some retailers don't ship to Canadian addresses, so you can....

### 2. Get yourself a U.S. mailing address.

Or a P.O. box and then pay to have your packages forwarded to your Canadian address.

Yellowknife-based money coach Nancy Zimmerman suggests Borderlinx, a company that for a \$30 (U.S.) registration fee provides you with an international shipping address. You can list that address as your own when you shop online, and then pay Borderlinx to ship your package to your own address. You can also rent a U.S. post-office box for a monthly or yearly fee and have your orders sent there to be forwarded to you.

But some retailers, particularly those on eBay, don't ship to P.O. boxes, so you can....

### 3. Use a package receiving company

If you live near a border town, you can list the mailing address of a U.S. package receiving company when you're shopping online, and then drive down to pick it up.

David Rodriguez, owner of CBI in Niagara Falls, N.Y., said his company has 1,200 Ontario clients because they can order things from private sellers who only ship to the continental United States.

"We have a lot of eBayers and if you say, 'Ship it to Canada,' they think it's the other side of the world," said Mr. Rodriguez.

When you go to CBI to pick up your package, all you need to pay is \$5.95 (U.S.) for the service.

But you may still have to. ...

### 4. Get a U.S. credit card

And also consider opening a U.S. bank account.

After Don Girdwood, owner of a Newmarket, Ont.-based tech-accessory company, grew frustrated by

retailers who would only accept American credit cards, he got a Bank of America bank account and Visa.

“It's a breeze, actually – all you really need is [a U.S.] address,” he explained.

Paying with U.S. funds means that even if the Canadian dollar sinks in value before his payment is cleared, Mr. Girdwood doesn't have to shell out more than he expected. He's also able to avoid his Canadian credit-card company's currency conversion fee (which can be upwards of 2 per cent with most Canadian companies).

But that's all quite a bit of paperwork so you can....

**Amerifriend [uh-MARE-uh-friend]** *-noun* 1. An American who lets a Canadian pal use his/her mailing address when shopping online, to skirt international shipping fees or restrictions, and then passes the item onto the Canadian friend by mail or in person. *-usage* “Why would I pay \$30 for J. Crew to send me that blazer when I can just get them to ship it to my Amerifriend and have her mail it to me?”

### **5. Rely on loved ones**

Ship to a friend or family member in the U.S. and have them mail it to you or deliver it in person.

This is your cheapest option since you can avoid having to pay a company to be your middle man. And remember, if you order something by mail that is classified as a gift and is worth \$60 (U.S.) or less, you can claim a tax and duty exemption on the purchase and avoid any brokerage fees. “That's one of the most common loopholes or tricks,” said Mr. King. “Every time I order from eBay, I ask them to put a label saying it's a gift.”

Just don't abuse this loophole – claiming something as a gift that isn't just to avoid taxes is considered fraud.