

My Great Coupon Experiment

Friday, 19 November 2010

Several times over the years I've attempted to cash in on couponing. You read about uber-frugal-shopping-gurus, like this one, who cut hundreds off their family grocery budget and can feed a family of 10 on pennies per week. Trouble is, whenever I've tried, I ended up spending more, stocking up on stuff I normally wouldn't buy, just because I had a great coupon.

Recently, in a discussion with some friends about using coupons, one lady mentioned that she "makes" money shopping at CVS and Walgreens. She explained a little about how she does it; how both stores offer cash-back on certain purchases and if she uses manufacturer coupons in addition, she comes out ahead!

Then, a couple weeks ago, I overheard another lady comment that she "hadn't paid for toiletries in over a year!" Wow, I thought, how does that work? She, too, mentioned using CVS and Walgreens programs.

Since we recently subscribed to the newspaper, I decided to try my own hand at manipulating the coupon fliers, to see if I could make money by shopping.

After spending a mind-numbing number of hours scouring the sale pages and coupon fliers, I was ready to tackle my first trip to CVS. Here's a list of what I bought, along with the products for which they were offering "Extra Bucks" (EBs):

My week 1 trip:

Product

Offer:

Spend/buy

Earn "Extra Bucks"

I spent

Lysol

\$15

\$5

\$20.00

Coke

Qty 4

\$3

\$13.00

Glade

\$10

\$3

\$7.50

Maybelline

\$10

\$3

\$15.49

Noxema

Qty 1

\$3

\$4.49

V8

Qty 2

\$1

\$6.00

Colgate

Qty 1

\$2

\$7.99

Duracel

1 pkg

\$2

\$16.49 Oops! Wrong package!

Items I also bought, not part of promotion:

Claritin 10ct

\$11.29

Mucinex

\$9.99

Chapstick

\$1.99

X-Box Gold

\$19.99

I bought the wrong package of batteries by mistake and had to make a return trip later in the week. The X-Box Gold was paid for by my son. The V8, I don't think I got the EBs for, but forgot to follow up on that.

The Return trip:

I bought more Glade products totaling \$5.00, which completed the requirement for \$3 EBs (but I really only needed \$2.50, so I spend \$2.50 unnecessarily).

Duracell batteries for \$9.99, paid for with my return credit and earned the \$2 EBs.

I used the EBs from trip#1 to pay for most of these items, paid \$2.77 out of pocket, and received \$17.85 for returning batteries which netted a \$15.08 credit off previous purchase.

Net spend/credit for my 1st purchase including the return trip: \$97.71, earning \$8.00 EBs for my next trip. My week 2 trip:

Hellman's

2//\$6

\$11

Ragu

2@3/5

\$3 (for spending \$10 of any combination of Ragu/Skippy/Hellman's)

Skippy

1@3/5

Aussie

2.99

\$2

\$2.99

Fiber One

2@3.99ea

\$3

\$7.98

Items bought w/out EB promotion:

Spring Water

2@.99ea

\$1.98

Turtle candy

2/\$6

\$6

Lipton GT
1@2/5

\$2.50

After using coupons, EBs, total cost: \$21.21, earned \$8 extra bucks for next trip.

So, my first 2 weeks shopping CVS cost me \$118.92 out of pocket, and I have \$8 EBs to use next time. Week 2, Walgreens:

Product

What I bought

Register Rewards

Welch's sparkling juice

2/\$6

M&M's

4/\$10

\$5

Colgate Total

1.99

Mailing envelopes

4/\$6

Listerine

4.79

Digiorno Pizza

2/\$10

\$1

Angel Soft

5.49

Infusium

5.99

\$3

I had \$9.50 in mfg coupons, bringing total purchase to \$41.82. I earned \$9 in register rewards. My total-spend between Walgreens and CVS was \$160.74. I have \$17 EBs/RRs to use toward future purchases, taking my net-spend down to \$143.74.

Not very impressive! I'm obviously a rookie. After conducting a post-mortem, I've determined a couple of places where I went wrong:

1. I should have read the "CVS 101" tutorial on moneysavingmom.com before attempting this feat on my own. I messed up on my first purchase by spending way too much out of pocket. I should have only bought items which, between EBs and coupons, would have worked out to be free. Then, once I'd accumulated a few EBs, supposedly, between stacking EBs, store coupons and manufacturer's coupons, I'd be positioned to bask in the perpetual roll of freebies.

Take my first ill-fated trip to CVS: I could have purchased only those items that earned EBs on the first trip then went back again to use the EBs on the additional items. That would have lowered my out-of-pocket amount. Many of the items I bought that didn't earn rewards, are ultimately available at competitive prices from HEB.

I should have checked the internet for coupons. For example, I had a Welch's coupon for \$1.00, but could have printed an internet one for \$2.00.

I plan to continue the experiment for a few more weeks, to see if, in the long haul, it really does pay to coupon. I'll keep you posted,