

## Buying used can save you thousands. Has thrift shopping gone mainstream?

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The Canadian Press

Published Friday, Mar. 06 2015, 6:00 AM EST

Last updated Monday, Mar. 09 2015, 2:17 PM EDT

Since Wendy Stewart started buying used goods online nearly a decade ago, she's become quite the second-hand maven.

Including her wardrobe of vintage clothing and shoes, a used smartphone, and several pieces of furniture, Stewart estimates she's easily saved thousands of dollars scouring the web for previously-owned items on websites like eBay, Etsy and Craigslist.

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"I can find a ton of things that are unique and in good condition," said the 33-year-old Hamilton-area resident.

"It's a great place to go, especially when there aren't any vintage clothing stores around where I live."

Stewart is one of the growing number of Canadians who have warmed to the idea of buying second-hand items, as the once-maligned practice of being thrifty becomes increasingly mainstream with the help of the Internet.

A new report from online classifieds company Kijiji says the average Canadian family of four saves about \$1,150 each year buying second-hand items, with total spending on used goods clocking in at nearly \$30 billion.

The study, completed in partnership with researchers at the University of Toronto and Montreal's Observatoire de la Consommation Responsable, found the most popular things to exchange included baby clothes, fashion accessories and electronics.

Saving money was a big factor, with 75 per cent of respondents saying it was the primary reason they bought or traded goods. About 2,000 respondents participated in the online survey, which was conducted from Nov. 11 to 20, 2014.

While second-hand savings certainly aren't going to be the foundation of a retirement plan, it's smart to incorporate a financial strategy, said Will Britton, a financial planner at Marlin Financial Inc. in Kingston, Ont.

"I treat it very similar to the way I do other spontaneous or unexpected lump sums that can drop into someone's plan," said Britton.

"Have an idea of what you're doing with your money as opposed to just frittering it away."

If you're a buyer, the money saved can be harder to quantify, and so it often winds up being spent on lifestyle enhancements, like an evening out or a vacation, said Rona Birenbaum, founder and president of financial planning service Caring for Clients Inc.,

She said that's fine, if you don't have higher priorities. But for people who overspend, then any money saved should immediately go towards paying off credit card debts.

That's especially true for sellers, who can sometimes generate a significant amount of cash if they're downsizing their home.

While posting a room of furniture on a free listings website might seem like the easy way to purge, Birenbaum suggests pausing to consider whether the items might be more valuable than you assume.

"If you're going to downsize, it makes sense to have a specialist from an auction house to do an evaluation and identify anything that could be auctioned off," she said, adding this is especially true if you're responsible for the estate of a deceased relative.

Even if you aren't considering a major downsize, free online listing websites are a good incentive to start cleaning out the garage come spring, Birenbaum added.

Stewart already makes an effort to get rid of unwanted clutter whenever she can.

Her husband sells his used video games online and pockets more money than he would by trading them at popular retailers, she said. The couple has also resold some of the used furniture they purchased online years ago, or given away big items for free, rather than paying to send them to the dump.

Even her relatives, who were once skeptical of buying used goods online, have found inspiration in the items she's found. Her father-in-law furnished his office with the help of one popular used goods website, Stewart said.

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