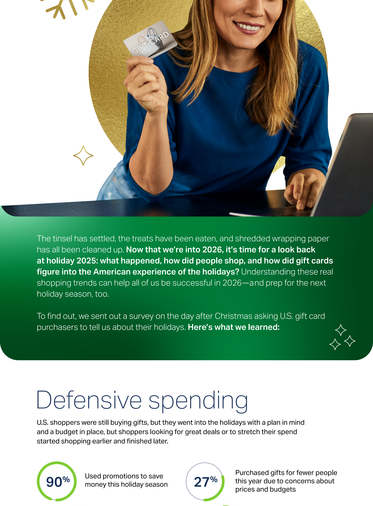
BHN

How holiday shoppers adapted to affordability challenges



The tinsel has settled, the treats have been eaten, and shredded wrapping paper has all been cleaned up. **Now that we're into 2026, it's time for a look back at holiday 2025: what happened, how did people shop, and how did gift cards figure into the American experience of the holidays?** Understanding these real shopping trends can help all of us be successful in 2026—and prep for the next holiday season, too.

To find out, we sent out a survey on the day after Christmas asking U.S. gift card purchasers to tell us about their holidays. **Here's what we learned:**

Defensive spending

U.S. shoppers were still buying gifts, but they went into the holidays with a plan in mind and a budget in place, but shoppers looking for great deals or to stretch their spend started shopping earlier and finished later.

90% Used promotions to save money this holiday season

27% Purchased gifts for fewer people this year due to concerns about prices and budgets

24% Shopped earlier compared to previous years to find deals and spread out spending

31% Said they found the best deals on Black Friday

Tools in a shopper's toolbox:

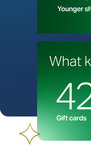
Promos, AI, gift cards, loyalty points

When faced with higher prices and more concerns about budgets and inflation, U.S. shoppers embraced gift cards as a safe haven. In fact, **71% of shoppers** said they purchased a gift card instead of a physical gift due to concerns about affordability. Gift cards were joined by other strategies, like AI deal-finding, paying with loyalty points, and Buy Now Pay Later programs.

Younger shoppers, with lower disposable incomes and higher rates of unemployment, were especially eager to find deals anywhere they could.

80%
bought digital gift cards as a last-minute gift on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day

BHN IQ Insight: Attract these shoppers by promoting your digital gift cards on December 23rd.



71% **of younger shoppers purchased a gift card instead of a physical gift due to concerns about affordability (49% of older shoppers did the same)**

73% **of younger shoppers used AI for holiday shopping (8% more than last year)**

Did you exchange loyalty points for gifts?

73% Younger shoppers

57% Older shoppers

What kind of gifts did you pay for with points?

42% Gift cards

37% Physical gift

10% Experiences

Customers aren't staying home, they're adapting

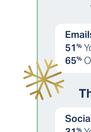
The show must go on, and shoppers weren't willing to give up on holiday gifting, even in a challenging economy. Instead, new trends in behavior emerged. **Gift cards offer real value to shoppers, and we saw the total amounts for cards gifted and intended overspend go up again this year.** We also saw changes in how shoppers found great deals, as younger shoppers put more of their trust in social media and online research tools.

3 gift cards received, on average

Average gift card total value:

2023:	2024:	2025:
$161	$206	$236

Average amount planned to spend beyond gift card value: **$108**



Total holiday gift spend:

<$35K*:	$35K-$75K*:	>$75K*:
$439	$684	$1,153

*average household income

How did you look for savings and deals?

Traditional sources skewed older:

Emails from brands
51% Younger
65% Older

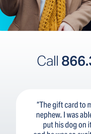
Brand websites
47% Younger
67% Older

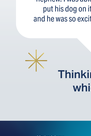
Third-party sources skewed younger:

Social media post
31% Younger
17% Older

Price comparison tools
(e.g., Google Shopping, ShopSavvy)
30% Younger
20% Older

Deal forums
(e.g., Slickdeals, Reddit r/deals)
22% Younger
10% Older





In 2025, people kept celebrating the holidays and building connections with people they love. **Did your gift cards help them celebrate?**

If you want to set up a gift card program—or make your gift cards work harder for you—**talk to a gift card expert at BHN today.**

Call 866.353.4877 or visit BHN.com to get started.

"The gift card to my nephew. I was able to put his dog on it, and he was so excited."

"I gave my friend who has had a really rough year a Visa gift card. I also included a handwritten card to wish her a better year and good health in 2026."

"I was able to give my parents a gift card to their favorite local restaurant in Vonore, Tennessee."

Thinking of the gifts you gave this holiday season, which one brought you the most joy to give?

Methodology:
This report is drawn from the results of two surveys that took place immediately after Christmas 2025. One survey was sent to gift card purchasers and one was sent to gift card recipients. The details of the surveys are: **Gift card purchasers:** BHN EQ 2025 Post Holiday Research, Jan 2026, on BIG, U.S. Gift Card Community, 18+, received a holiday gift. **Gift card recipients:** BHN EQ 2025 Post Holiday Research, Jan 2026, on BIG, U.S. Gift Card Community, 18+, received a holiday gift.