

Feb 16, 2010

## **Americans Still Cutting Back on the Small Things to Save Money**

### ***Almost two-thirds buying generics and almost half brown bagging it***

The economy is turning around based on what one hears from economists and the White House. But are most Americans behaving as if they believe things are getting better? When it comes to small things people can do each day to save money, consumers are still acting cautiously. For example, almost two-thirds of U.S. adults (63%) say they have purchased more generic brands in the past six months to save money while an additional 12% say they have considered doing so.

These are some of the results of **The Harris Poll** of 2,576 adults surveyed online between January 18 and 25, 2010 by **Harris Interactive**.

There are other things Americans are doing or have considered doing in the past six months to save some money:

- Almost half (45%) say they are brown bagging lunch instead of purchasing it, with 8% having considered doing so; 34% say this is not applicable to them;
- Two in five (39%) are going to the hairdresser/barber/stylist less often and 8% have considered doing so;
- One-third of Americans (34%) have switched to refillable water bottles instead of purchasing bottles of water while 10% have considered doing so;
- The media is also taking a hit as 33% of U.S. adults have cancelled one or more magazine subscriptions, one in five (19%) have cancelled a newspaper subscription and 22% have cancelled or cut back on cable television service with an additional one in five (20%) having considered doing so; and,
- One in five Americans say they have cut down on dry cleaning (22%) and stopped purchasing coffee in the morning (21%).

The only thing a majority of U.S. adults say they have neither done nor considered doing is changing or cancelling their cell phone service (52%), and only 15% have done so.

### **Generational differences in spending/saving**

There are also some generational differences in what people are doing to save money. Gen Xers (those aged 34-45) are more likely to brown bag lunch (56%) and cut back on hair styling (43%). Matures (those aged 65 and older) are more likely to cancel a magazine subscription (45%). Echo Boomers (those aged 18-33) are more likely to cancel their landline service and only use their cell phone (20%) and to carpool or use mass transit (26%).

### **So what?**

These may seem like small savings, but they are the things many financial planners say people need to do more of to save money. And, it seems in these times of greater economic hardship, Americans are finally heeding that advice. Are these cuts temporary or will they become lifestyle changes? Will people spend more on these items when the economy turns around? And when will that be?

**TABLE 1**  
**SPENDING/SAVINGS OVER PAST SIX MONTHS**

"Have you done or considered doing any of the following over the past six months in order to save money?"

Base: All adults

	Have Done	Have Considered	Have not done nor considered	Not applicable
Purchasing more generic brands	%63	12	18	7
Brown bagging lunch instead of purchasing it	%45	8	13	34
Going to the hairdresser/barber/stylist less often	%39	8	31	22
Switched to refillable water bottle instead of purchasing bottle of water	%34	10	21	34
Cancelled one or more magazine subscriptions	%33	7	23	37
Cut down on dry cleaning	%22	4	17	57
Cancelled or cut back cable television service	%22	20	41	18
Stopped purchasing coffee in the morning	%21	6	19	54
Cancelled a newspaper subscription	%19	9	31	42
Changed or cancelled cell phone service	%17	14	52	17
Cancelled landline phone service and only using cell phone	%15	21	45	19
Begun carpooling or using mass transit	%14	8	31	48

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 2**  
**SPENDING/SAVINGS OVER PAST SIX MONTHS – TREND OF HAVE DONE**

"Have you done or considered doing any of the following over the past six months in order to save money?"

*Percent saying "Have done"*

Base: All adults

	June 2009	Oct. 2009	Feb. 2010
Purchasing more generic brands	% 62	64	63
Brown bagging lunch instead of purchasing it	% 47	47	45
Going to the hairdresser/barber/stylist less often	% 36	43	39
Switched to refillable water bottle instead of purchasing bottle of water	% 33	36	34
Cancelled one or more magazine subscriptions	% 29	34	33
Cut down on dry cleaning	% 20	22	22
Cancelled or cut back cable television service	% 19	21	22
Stopped purchasing coffee in the morning	% 15	20	21
Cancelled a newspaper subscription	% 17	21	19
Changed or cancelled cell phone service	% 14	15	17
Cancelled landline phone service and only using cell phone	% 11	12	15
Begun carpooling or using mass transit	% 13	14	14

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 3**  
**SPENDING/SAVINGS OVER PAST SIX MONTHS – BY GENERATION**

"Have you done or considered doing any of the following over the past six months in order to save money?"

Percent saying "Have done"

Base: All adults

	Generation				
	Total	Echo Boomers (18-33)	Gen. X (34-45)	Baby Boomers (46-64)	Matures (65+)
	%	%	%	%	%
Purchasing more generic brands	63	60	66	63	61
Brown bagging lunch instead of purchasing it	45	51	56	46	20
Going to the hairdresser/barber/stylist less often	39	39	43	38	35
Switched to refillable water bottle instead of purchasing bottle of water	34	40	37	31	28
Cancelled one or more magazine subscriptions	33	24	31	36	45
Cut down on dry cleaning	22	18	24	21	27
Cancelled or cut back cable television service	22	24	26	22	14
Stopped purchasing coffee in the morning	21	25	27	19	14
Cancelled a newspaper subscription	19	16	20	20	20
Changed or cancelled cell phone service	17	19	20	17	11
Cancelled landline phone service and only using cell phone	15	20	16	15	6
Begun carpooling or using mass transit	14	26	16	7	4

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

### Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States January 18 to 25, 2010 among 2,576 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

***These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.***

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