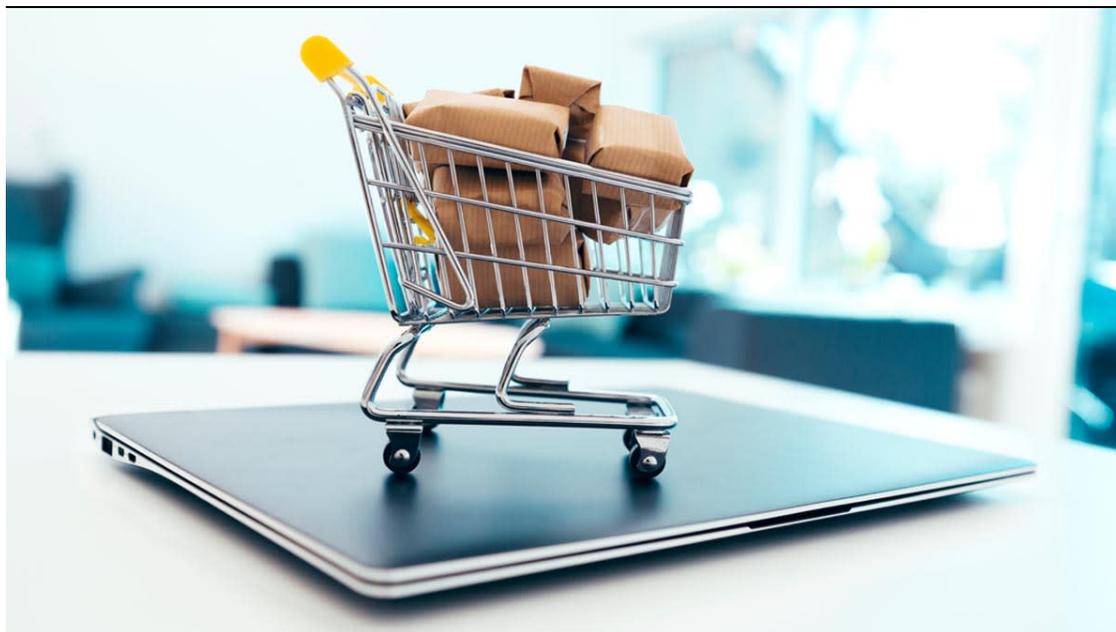


# Amazon Prime vs. Sam's Club Plus: The Online Shopping Face-Off

Here's how these major retail outlets compare in delivering value to consumers

By Beth Braverman  
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Sam's Club has been long been a favorite among consumers who like to carry home bulk purchases at bargain prices. Now the Walmart-owned warehouse chain has launched a new program to attract a growing number of online shoppers as well.

Last month, Sam's Club announced that it had revamped its top-tier membership plan, which is now called "Sam's Club Plus." The program provides new perks to members, including free shipping on most items purchased online.

Priced at \$100 per household, the Plus program appears to compete directly with the \$99 (or \$13 per month) Amazon Prime membership. Here's how the two plans stack up.

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## Free Shipping

**Sam's Club Plus:** Members get free shipping on most items sold at [SamsClub.com](http://SamsClub.com), from tires to household appliances as well as many of the store's Member's Mark products, with no minimum order amount. There are some exclusions to the items available for free shipping, including bulk items, auction items, and fresh groceries.

Delivery will come via standard ground shipping, though plans suggest that guaranteed delivery times may be shortened eventually. The company has said it intends to convert up to a dozen of its recently closed stores to "eCommerce fulfillment centers in a move that will speed the delivery of online orders."

**Amazon Prime:** The e-tail giant offers members free two-day shipping for millions of Prime-eligible items on its site. Prime members in more than 5,000 cities can get same-day or one-day delivery on items when placing an order of \$35 or more;

and members in select cities with Prime Now can get two-hour shipping on purchases of Whole Food groceries, and from affiliated local stores and restaurants.

Non-Prime members get free delivery on purchases of \$25 or more.

**The winner:** Guaranteed two-day (or faster) shipping gives Prime the edge over Plus for now.

## Shopping Rewards

**Sam's Club Plus:** Plus members will get \$10 back for every \$500 spent on qualifying purchases for a total of up to \$500 per year. The Sam's Club MasterCard does not offer any special incentives for purchases made at Sam's Club, but it does offers 5 percent back on gas; 3 percent on dining and travel; and 1 percent on other purchases.

**Amazon Prime:** There is no automatic cash-back program for Prime Members, but those with an Amazon Prime Rewards Visa card enjoy 5 percent cash back on Amazon.com purchases and 5 percent cash back at Whole Foods (in addition to 2 percent back on restaurant, gas, and drugstore purchases, and 1 percent on everything else.)

**The winner:** Plus takes this one, since there is no rewards program for Prime members without the co-branded card. For members willing to open a new card, however, the Amazon perks offer a bit more value.

## Other Perks

**Sam's Club Plus:** The savings on prescriptions might be the most valuable for Plus members. In most states, members will be able to fill up to five select prescriptions for free without insurance, have access to more than 600 generic prescriptions for \$10 or less; and get up to 30 percent off some brand name drugs. Here's a list of drugs included in the program.

In addition to prescription savings, Sam's Club Plus members will get a discount on glasses with the purchase of a year's supply of contact lenses, as well as more access to the stores. Doors at some Sam's Clubs will open at 7 a.m., Monday through Saturday, for Plus members, while those with the standard membership will have to wait until regular club hours to start shopping in-store.

**Amazon Prime:** Prime members have access to an array of services beyond shopping, which enhance the value of the membership. Those services include instant access to video streaming and movie streaming, unlimited photo services, access to more than 1,000 free books, magazines, and more via the Prime Reading catalog.

**The winner:** It's a draw. For early morning shoppers or those looking to cut their prescription drug bill, Plus may offer more compelling perks. Amazon's streaming services can be quite valuable for the consumers who use them.

## The Bottom Line

Sam's Club's new Plus membership may make sense for consumers who frequent the store often or fill their prescriptions at the pharmacy there, as well as online

shoppers who don't mind waiting for standard ground shipping delivery times.

Amazon Prime has far more extensive benefits in terms of nonretail perks. But they're not a great value for those who don't shop online often or who won't take advantage of the streaming or other online services.

It is possible to try out both programs without making a huge commitment. Prime offers new members a 30-day free trial, although you'll have to remember to cancel the membership before the trial period ends or you'll automatically be charged for the next period. Sam's Club offers a 100 percent refund on all membership fees if a customer is unsatisfied.