

Free coupons -- no printing, no clipping

Got [coupons](#)? Maybe not. Maybe your local [paper](#) includes few or no Sunday inserts. Maybe you're feeling so squeezed by the economic [downturn](#) that you can't afford new printer cartridges -- or for that matter, a Sunday paper.

Stephanie Nelson of [CouponMom.com](#) suggests a way to get free coupons. It takes very little work and is paying off for one of Nelson's co-workers.

First, write up a boilerplate note: "Your (insert product name here) is a terrific product. It (gets my whites whiter/makes my house cleaner/tastes much better) than any other products on the market. I've been using this product (for years/for decades/forever) but lately money has been tight and I have had to switch to store brands. Do you happen to have any coupons that you mail out to loyal customers?" Next, go to the Web sites of companies whose products you like. Look for a customer feedback section. Cut and paste your e-mail. Hit "send." Finally: Start checking your mailbox. Nelson says a co-worker who does this is "getting a lot of coupons in the mail -- some of the coupons are even for free items."

Sure, [product feedback](#) is a time-honored way to get noticed. Write or call to praise, or to complain, and you will often be rewarded. But Nelson's suggestion provides more bang for the buck. You can send a lot of e-mails fairly quickly, and this method requires neither stamps nor "hold time" on an 800 number.

Don't have the Internet at home? Head for the public [library](#), or ask to borrow a friend's. (Hint: If you get a free baking mix out of the deal, be sure to take a few cupcakes over to your generous friend.)

If even one-fourth of the companies respond, this could be worth the effort -- especially if you [double](#) the coupons, "stack" them (i.e., combine them with in-store coupons), or combine them with [sales/rebates](#). Should any of those companies send coupons for free items, that's quite the bonus; if they do, watch for "buy one, get one free" deals for that product and you'll get them both for free.

Nelson isn't suggesting you give up on Sunday circulars or printable coupons, however. "If they are for items you use anyway and you're printing a \$5-off coupon for diapers, that's real money."

Incidentally, she surveyed her readers and found that nearly 90% of them have no trouble redeeming printable coupons.

One more tip: If you have a store [loyalty card](#) and don't get coupons mailed to you periodically, get rid of the old card and re-apply -- and this time, fill out and submit the form. "If you are not getting coupons from the store in the mail, then you probably didn't give them your address," Nelson says. Some day soon, you'll be able to have [paperless coupons](#) downloaded to your cell phone or loyalty card. Then you won't have to worry about printed vs. clipped coupons -- or about forgetting to bring the coupons with you.