

Cyber Security Consumer Tip Sheet

Safe practices for e-commerce

Thanks to the Internet, we now have access to an online marketplace of staggering proportions. If it exists, then it's probably on the Internet.

Despite the benefits of online commerce, there are a few pitfalls and risks to watch out for in order to make your online shopping a positive experience.

What are the Advantages of Online Commerce?

There are many reasons why online commerce has become so popular:

- It's convenient. Not only can you shop from home and have it delivered to you, you also have an electronic record of purchases, payments and deliveries.
- There are a lot of different ways to pay: credit cards (including disposable or low-limit cards), online payment services, gift cards, site credits, and so on, many of which allow us to control how much of our financial information we are sharing and how much money we can spend at a time.
- It has built-in safety tools: many sites are equipped with features such as icons and alerts that help us to protect ourselves from being scammed. If you use them, you make it much easier to keep your shopping safe.
- It's easy to do research before you buy by finding customer reviews on products, services, and even individual vendors/buyers online.

What are the Risks of Online Commerce?

Like anything we do on the Internet, online commerce has its risks:

- Online shopping can be *too* convenient: it's easy to get carried away with the sheer variety of things available online.
- Beware of bargains: there can be many hidden costs to buying online such as shipping and duty charges.
- Scam artists offer deals that are too good to be true, selling goods that are counterfeit, damaged, stolen or simply nonexistent. Easy-to-use Web design software has made it easy for scammers to create entire fake storefronts. Well-known auction sites and marketplaces such

as eBay or Etsy may be reputable (though you should always check to make sure you're at the correct Web address), but it doesn't mean the vendors or buyers always are.

- User information is sometimes archived by vendors. While this is said to be for convenience purposes (usually to make "one click shopping") it's risky to store personal and financial information online, and several online businesses have had their customer information hacked and stolen.
- Some sites will store login information and recent credit card details in cookie files in your browser's cache.

How You Can Protect Yourself

Luckily, there are a number of tools and strategies that can help keep online shopping safe and trouble-free:

Use a credit card. Credit cards typically have robust protections against identity theft: it's usually easy to cancel charges for purchases you didn't make, and credit card companies keep a watch for suspicious activity on your card. You can also get a separate credit card with a low credit limit to use online, which will further limit your possible losses.

Try a disposable card or gift card or a site credit. For small purchases, you can use disposable prepaid credit or gift cards (available in most grocery stores, pharmacies, and gas stations). These cards are usually available in amounts of \$10 - \$100 and are depleted once used. These payment methods have the added benefit of being completely anonymous. Some sites, such as iTunes, also offer site credits; this is a good way of allowing kids to buy from these sites without giving them access to a credit card.

Make sure your data is encrypted. Your web browser will let you know if you are shopping on an encrypted site. The closed padlock icon or the prefix "https:" are intended to let you know that your transaction is secure (this does not, however, mean that your data is secure at any other time, only during the transaction itself).

Clear your cache. After purchases, print a copy of your transaction receipt or save it to your computer as a PDF. Then clear your browser's cache to remove evidence of your transaction.

Keep your software up to date and your computer secure. It is important that your computer be updated with the latest security features and bug fixes. Security software that keeps your computer free of malware will help keep it safe to send your financial information over your computer.

Be wary of in-app purchases. Many of the apps you know and love on your smart phone and tablet devices include the possibility of upgrading the application, buying extra features, or purchasing media with the minimum amount of hassle. While this is convenient, it can also cause you to rack up unexpected costs. If you share your device with other people, make sure that

you don't have your account information saved on it so as to reduce the likelihood of accidental purchases. Purchases made in apps are rarely reversible.

Log out. On shared computers, it is important to get into the habit of clearing the information you would otherwise leave behind. It is also important to actually log out (via a "log out" or "exit" link) of online stores so that subsequent users don't have access to your accounts, purchase information, and payment methods.

Get informed. Before buying from a website or doing business with another user, look into who you'll be doing business with. Marketplace sites typically have user ratings and you can do a web search for reviews of products and services before buying them. If a given website or product has no reviews online, it may be worth waiting a little while to see what others say about it.

Look closely. Items can be described in various ways and the language used can sometimes alert you to what's actually being sold: words like "refurbished" or "like new" are just ways of saying "used" (this isn't a bad thing, but it is worth knowing what it is you're buying). On some sites, scam artists will go so far as to state that an item is not actually the item in the photograph. This should give you pause.

Avoid knockoffs. If you are buying merchandise, look to make certain it is licensed and not counterfeit. There is a huge market online for counterfeit versions of high-end designer goods. Not only are counterfeit goods illegal, but they are usually of shoddy workmanship. It's not impossible to find good deals online, but you should be wary of deals that make you want to run for your credit card.

Pay fair. Some of the most tempting bargains on the Internet are for goods that were stolen or otherwise acquired illegally. These deals are often covers for scams because the vendors know you're unlikely to report the fraud: after all, a victim is far less likely to report being swindled to police if the item they were purchasing was a music album that hasn't been released yet, or a DVD of a movie that isn't even playing in cinemas. Even if the items are real, you could be breaking the law by buying stolen goods.

Report fraud. If you are a victim of online fraud, it's important to report it so that other people can't get scammed the same way. If you know about successful or attempted crime online, visit www.recol.ca to report it.

For more information:

See *Cyber Security Consumer Tip Sheet* from the Canadian Internet Registry Authority (CIRA) and MediaSmarts available at www.cira.ca and on the MediaSmarts website at www.mediasmarts.ca, as well as other digital literacy resources.

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