



## Internet shopping

### Internet shopping: the basics



Your computer screen is a shop window for retailers, whether they trade only online, or offer both in-store and online buying.

When you buy online it's more difficult to judge the quality of a product or company or to sort out problems if the transaction goes wrong.

### Before you buy online

Try to ensure the business you are dealing with is reputable by following these tips for a safer online shopping experience.

Look for sites that provide:

- adequate contact details – phone, fax, email and street address (not just a PO Box number)
- what currency the purchase price is in (if an overseas company)
- every cost that would be incurred to purchase a particular item (including cost of the product or service, delivery, postage & handling)
- security for online payments
- their return, exchange, or refund policies
- how you can lodge a complaint
- the legal jurisdiction that will apply to the transaction (ie the trader's or the customer's country), or the disputes resolution process that will apply (eg, an Ombudsman Scheme or industry code)
- any restrictions or conditions that may apply to the purchase (such as geographic restrictions or parental/guardian approval for minors)
- their privacy policy.

### Do your research

Use a search engine to find other retailers and compare prices and conditions. Also:

- compare costs with your local stores, but take into account extra costs (delivery, insurance, customs duty, sales tax, foreign exchange rates) you may incur with online purchases
- contact online retailers directly and ask about their goods and services when dealing with them for the first time
- be wary of offers that appear too good to be true
- check the legality of importing particular goods from overseas
- for electronic goods check that they are safe ([see the Energy Safety website for more information](#))
- check freight or delivery method and costs
- print out your order before you send it
- monitor children's access - some firms market directly to children
- don't deal with retailers who are evasive and won't provide contact numbers or addresses
- don't participate in pyramid selling schemes – they are illegal (they may come in the form of network marketing, chain letters, get rich quick schemes and home based employment opportunities)
- don't rely on only one source of information
- don't give details of your bank account to any business

### Paying for online purchases

Most online businesses let you pay using a credit or debit card.

Use your credit/debit card for payment online only if the retailer uses a secure payment system.

A way to identify a secure website is if you see a lock icon appear somewhere in the window of your browser (but not in the web page itself).

An advantage of paying by credit card is that some credit card companies will allow a transaction to be reversed if a charge is made to your card which you dispute for any reason.

## **Got a problem with an online purchase?**

### **Your rights**

#### **If the business is in New Zealand**

Negotiate with the retailer by letter or e-mail and keep copies of your order/invoices. The laws (e.g. Consumer Guarantees Act, Fair Trading Act) that apply to over-the-counter sales also apply to internet sales.

[See here for more information on the Consumer Guarantees Act.](#)

[See here for more information on the Fair Trading Act.](#)

#### **If the business is located overseas**

Econsumer.gov (a joint venture of the International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network, of which New Zealand is a member) contains contact information for some overseas consumer agencies, information on buying online including online auctions, advice and guidance on resolving an online shopping complaint, and the opportunity to file an online complaint.

[If you have had a problem with an overseas business, visit the eConsumer website.](#)