

Attorney General Frosh Offers Consumers Tips for Safe Online Shopping This Holiday Season

Many Consumers Expected to Opt for Online Over Brick and Mortar Shopping

BALTIMORE MD (December 8, 2020) – The unofficial holiday shopping season has begun and retailers are expected to continue offering discount deals typically seen only on Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, and Cyber Monday. Facing the unprecedented health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the convenience of online shopping, many consumers will opt to shop from the comfort of their own homes this year. In fact, a survey conducted by Adobe Analytics predicts a 33 percent increase in online shopping this year compared to 2019.

“The measures that we all must take to keep ourselves and loved ones safe, such as wearing masks and social distancing, makes shopping in person more difficult this year,” said Attorney General Frosh. “For those Marylanders who wish to avoid in-person shopping, we urge you to learn about online shopping traps to avoid becoming a victim of an online fraudster or scam.”

If online shopping is part of the plan this year, Attorney General Frosh is offering these tips to help consumers avoid scams, fraudulent products, and exposure to computer or smart device malware:

Be sure the website on which you’re entering payment information is secure. You should never send personal information or payments through a website if the address does not begin with “https”— the “s” at the end means that your confidential information is secure.

Be wary about clicking on ads found on a webpage or social networking sites. Scammers frequently lure consumers through social media or emails to fake websites, which are set up to steal personal and/or financial information, or could release malware into your computer.

Avoid paying online retailers with gift cards, wired funds, or by sending cash. If possible, use a credit card to make your online purchases. If you have a dispute with the retailer, the credit card company may help you resolve it.

Research the retailer. Check online reviews to see if the retailer has a good reputation and satisfied customers. Is there an easy way to contact customer service if you have any problems? If not, you may want to consider another retailer.

Purchase gift cards only from reputable sources. Cards sold by individuals or at auction sites often turn out to be stolen or counterfeit. Buying gift cards directly from the business is always a safe option. Pop-up ads, text messages, emails, or social media posts offering free gift cards could be scams attempting to steal your personal information, release malware, or otherwise get you to disclose your financial information.

Many consumers also make generous donations to charities during the holiday season. This is also a prime time for crooks to take advantage of that generosity. Before donating, check to see if the charity in which you are interested is registered with the [Maryland Secretary of State's Office](#). Several websites (such as GuideStar and Charity Navigator) provide information on an organization's financials, mission statements, and more. This may help you decide how to allocate your giving. Bogus charities frequently use names and logos that resemble well-known, legitimate organizations. These charities often surface during national emergencies, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. Read more about charitable donations in our "[Keeping Your Eyes Open When Donating to Charities](#)" Consumer's Edge.

For additional information about safe online shopping, read our "[Smart Shopping from Home](#)" Consumer's Edge. The Maryland Attorney General's Office offers free publications, including the Consumer's Edge, to educate consumers. A full list of publications can be found at <http://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/Pages/CPD/TipsPublications/edunit.aspx>. Consumers are encouraged to download, reproduce, and share these publications.