

SmartGuard Newsletter

Be Home this Holiday Season

Tips for Safe Online Shopping

Online shopping has opened up a new world of opportunities. Shopping online is easier, takes less time, and often takes less money than traditional shopping. This holiday season millions of consumers will spend billions online. In fact, Americans will do more than thirty percent of their holiday shopping through the internet. As the problem of identity theft continues to grow, so does the fear of falling victim to identity theft grow in the minds of consumers. However, online shopping can be safe if you follow a few safety precautions.

Here are some tips to help make your online shopping experience safe and secure.

Good Targets

Only do business with websites that offer secure transactions. A secure website uses a special computer communication called a Secure Socket Layer (SSL). This communication encrypts data and breaks it up so outsiders cannot read the information. An easy way to determine whether you are on a secure site is to look at your internet browser for a padlock symbol, or check to see that the address bar changes from "http" to "https".

Follow the Crowds:

There are so many places to buy products online, so which ones are the best? Just as you might ask friends where they have been shopping, the same is available online. There are many large websites that provide search engines and access to multiple shopping sites, ie. Yahoo, Google, MSN. These sites are great for comparison shopping as well as providing customer satisfaction ratings. You can quickly learn from previous customers whether the site delivers the right product, how well they handle returns, and customer complaints or issues. If it is your first time shopping with a company, be sure to do your homework. A legitimate merchant will always provide a valid phone number and address.

Credit Not Debit:

Always use your credit card when purchasing online. Credit cards are protected under the Federal Fair Credit Billing Act. This means that you will be protected in the event your information is taken. So, what's the problem with Debit cards? The major problem is that a Debit/ATM card is a direct line into your bank account. Within seconds of getting your account number a scammer can empty your bank account of all available funds. In addition, Debit/ATM cards are not protected by the federal law. The Identity Theft Resource Center suggests using a separate credit card for online purchases only. This will help aid in the early detection of any fraudulent activity.

Read the Fine Print:

Be sure to read all the facts before making a purchase. Privacy Statements will help you determine whether a company will sell your information to others for marketing purposes. Return policies will vary from one company to another. Be familiar with your return policy in the event your purchase is not what you expected. The Terms of Agreement helps you know how you will be protected if something goes wrong with your purchase. It may take a little time to read over all the information provided, but it will definitely save you more time in the end.

As stated before, the benefits of online shopping can far outweigh the risks. Because of recent online security breakthroughs, online shopping can be safer than shopping in person or over the phone. Follow these simple tips and you can safely be among the many who are home for the holidays.