DATCP: Simple steps for safe cyber shopping

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MADISON – Shopping online for holiday gifts this year? You are not alone. The number of consumers using computers and mobile devices to compare items and prices, make purchases, and track shipments continues to increase each year. While these e-commerce systems continue to evolve with a focus on security, the scammers are also evolving and honing their craft to find new potential scams and exploits. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection advises holiday shoppers to keep their devices and applications up to date and to watch out for too-good-to-be-true offers and fake shopping websites.

"Before consumers begin their online holiday shopping, we encourage you to take some basic measures in order to be better protected from scammers," said Michelle Reinen, Director of the Bureau of Consumer Protection. "Check your devices for security updates before you start looking online for gifts, limit your transactions on public Wi-Fi networks, and be suspicious of questionable offers on unfamiliar websites and in social media posts."

Online holiday scams often feature in-demand products like electronics and fashion items to attract your attention. Scammers use fake websites, classified ads, social media messages, and text and email blasts to try to trick you into downloading malware or providing your personal or banking information. Beware of unrealistic offers, coupons, and other enticements – especially from websites with which you are not familiar.

Keep your online shopping experience safe by following these simple tips:

- Update your device's operating system and antivirus software before you start

shopping.

- Make sure a website is legitimate before ordering. Check for the company's name, physical location, and contact information. Remember that identity thieves can create websites that mimic a legitimate business's site, so don't trust a site based solely on its appearance. Lastly, do some quick research to see if there are any warnings about the site online and contact Wisconsin's Consumer Protection Hotline (800-422-7182 or datcphotline@wi.gov) to see if complaints have been filed against the business.
- Avoid social media posts or emails that appear to offer free vouchers or gift cards – they often lead to online surveys designed to steal personal information.
- When purchasing gift cards online, be leery of auction sites selling discounted or bulk gift cards – you may end up with cards that have been tampered with, have been used or that are expired.
- Make sure you are on a secure site before you enter your password or any personal or banking information. Secure sites start with "https" rather than "http" (the "s" stands for "secure").
- Pay by credit card. If you use a credit card, federal law gives you the right to dispute charges if you report them to the credit card company within 60 days of receiving the statement.
- Keep a paper trail. Print or save records of online transactions, item descriptions, and copies of emails sent between you and the seller. Carefully review credit card statements after the holidays to look for unauthorized charges.

For additional information or to file a consumer complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at datcp.wi.gov, send an e-mail to datcphotline@wi.gov, or call the Consumer Protection Hotline toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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