**Better Business Bureau’s Ultimate Guide to Safe Online Shopping**

As inflation continues to impact households throughout the U.S., consumers will be keeping a closer eye on the latest deals. Unfortunately, that also means scammers are ready to lure people in with “unbeatable” prices and lead them to less reputable websites.

Landing on an unfamiliar website can garner mixed results. From a low-quality order that doesn’t meet the advertised expectations to never receiving the items at all. The key is knowing how to spot suspicious websites and using trusted resources to research a business before making a purchase. Unfamiliar websites aren’t always a bad thing – you may have just found your new favorite small business!

Better Business Bureau encourages consumers to take these precautionary steps before making an online purchase – especially from unfamiliar websites.

**1. Check the design quality**

[Kaspersky](https://www.kaspersky.com/resource-center/preemptive-safety/scam-websites) warns that low quality visuals, odd layouts, and poor web design can all be warning signs of a fake website. Before you take action on a site, ask yourself if the design quality measures up to the reputation of the business or person it represents. Scammers are catching on to how important the design quality is to appear more convincing, so be sure to also look for any inconsistencies in grammar, sentence structure and content quality.

**2. Pay attention to address and contact information**

Legitimate online stores should provide you with a physical address and working phone number in the contact section. If those elements are missing, that is a major red flag. Take it one step further by looking up the address to check whether it coincides with the business. We also recommend calling the customer service number to verify that it’s operational and to get a sense of how responsive the business is, in case you have any issues with your order.

**3. Check for a clear and transparent return policy**

Return and shipping policies should be clear and easy to understand. If a shop has policies, but you aren’t convinced it’s legitimate, try copying and pasting the policy section into your web browser to see if it’s been copied and pasted from another website.

**4. Do a search for reviews and potential scams**

If you still can’t tell if a website is real or fake, try typing the website name along with the word “scam” or “reviews” into your web browser. If other people have been victims of a fake site, you’re likely to find reports when you search for scams. A reputable store should have plenty of reviews for you to examine. Be alert to reviews that are generic, sound robotic or unnatural, or are too brief as these could be fakes.

Also, make sure to check their BBB Business Profile on [BBB.org](https://www.bbb.org/) to view ratings, potential consumer alerts, complaint reports and verified customer reviews.

**5. Shop online with a credit card**

In case of a fraudulent transaction, a credit card provides additional protections. It’s also another outlet for consumers to report the incident and potentially get their money back.

**6. Keep documentation of your order**

Save a copy of the confirmation page or email confirmation until you receive the item and are satisfied. According to the [Federal Trade Commission’s mail order rule](https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/resources/business-guide-ftcs-mail-internet-or-telephone-order-merchandise-rule), when you shop online, sellers are supposed to ship your order within the time stated in their ads or within 30 days if the ads don’t give a time. If a seller can’t ship within the promised time, they must give you a revised shipping date, with the chance to either cancel your order for a full refund or accept the new shipping date.

For more consumer tips, visit bbb.org.