

Avoid Scams this Holiday Season

The holiday shopping season is in full swing, which means the scammers are out in full force. Every year, as shoppers seek out the best holiday deals, thousands of consumers fall victim to the scams and bogus charity pleas that crop up around the holiday season. Consider the following tips to avoid falling victim to a scam.

When Buying Gift Cards: During the holiday season, when gift card purchases go up, thieves take advantage by swiping the information from gift cards on display in stores. They then periodically check online to see if the card has been activated. Once a consumer purchases the card and activates it, the scammer uses it to shop online. If you're buying gift cards not kept behind the counter at a store, carefully inspect the card for signs of tampering, including torn or bent packaging.

When Donating: The past few years have seen a rise in the number of fake charities, many of which claim to support popular issues of homelessness, child welfare or disaster relief. When giving back, work directly with an official website or representative, rather than someone setting up shop on a street corner or community center. You can also find up-to-date reports on local and national charities at www.give.org.

When Bargain-Hunting: Remind yourself to stay grounded. No matter how many deals you see advertised during the holidays, keep your expectations grounded in reality. If the price seems too good to be true, then it probably is. If you're questioning whether the online deal you see is real, that's your first red flag that it probably isn't. To double-check, do a quick search for the same product on other shopping websites. If the "deal" you found is more than 50 percent lower than everything else you're seeing, it's probably a scam.

If you think you may be a victim, take action. Don't wait for the criminals to drain your accounts. At the first sign of suspicious activity, call your bank directly and have them freeze your accounts so the thieves cannot steal additional funds. Your bank will work with you on how to resolve the issue based on your unique circumstances.



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