SHOPPING GUIDE BY TINA





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Don't miss out on our other cool manuals!

INTRODUCTION - WHY AN EBOOK ABOUT SHOPPING?

These days, shopping is not merely a necessity of life. With the rise of color magazines and TV in the 20th century, along with improved mobility and the spreading of supermarkets, department stores, and shopping malls; shopping has evolved from a comfortable way to obtain required goods into something pleasurable, a hobby and eventually mass entertainment for an entire generation.

Psychologists, statisticians, graphic artists, authors, and whatnot have teamed up and carved out an elaborate niche for themselves: marketing. That is the process to create the customer, keep the customer, and satisfy the customer. In other words, we are consumers and we must be fed.

What they do is create an artificial need in us. We realize we need this item in order to be successful, attractive or respected. Without this product, our life is not complete. We have a problem and we must solve it. This product is the key. In other words, we need to buy this to be happy. While all of these statements, in regards to any luxury item, aren't exactly true, we have to admit that it is a pleasure to spend money on things that improve life one way or the other. Yes, shopping is a superfluous modern pleasure, just like taking a shower every day. So what?

So you don't get the best you deserve. This guide will achieve three things: improve your shopping experience, improve your shopping success, and save you money. This guide outlines the necessary steps you need to take, decisions you have to make, and tools you can use to prevent being misled by aggressive marketing. In short: take time, research, compare and shop safely. Following these recommendations will help you spend less money and buy better products.



Credits: wengistein via Flickr

Hopefully, you will decide to spend the money you save on something meaningful, such as an emergency fund, health insurance or education of yourself and/or your kids.

OFFLINE VS. ONLINE

Whether you shop for clothes, gadgets or personalized gifts, first you must decide where to start. Are you going to enjoy the comfort of shopping from your couch or do you prefer to touch and try what you're going to purchase? Both approaches have their pros and cons, and sometimes it's best to combine them.



Credits: ephotion via Flickr

Online shopping has a number of advantages. First of all, you don't have to leave your house. You can shop anytime you want because online stores are always open. You can do thorough research, read customer reviews and objective product tests. Furthermore, you can rapidly compare prices across multiple online shops and hunt down the best deal available. Doing this, you also save a lot of time since you don't have to push through crowds, find what you want, compare prices from one store to the next, and hide from overly helpful and dangerously convincing sales assistants. Last but not least, your shopping will be delivered to your door, so you don't even have to carry or transport it. Really, leaving the house to shop is not worth the hassle.

To sum up, you should shop online if you...

- are short on time
- want to make sure you get the best deal
- hate crowds
- feel disturbed by sales assistants
- know exactly what you want



Credits: lemsipmatt via Flickr

On the other hand, shopping is a highly enjoyable activity for many people. They love to browse stores and chat with staff. Either way, old-school shopping has many advantages, besides serving as entertainment. While it may take more time to compare and get a good deal, you will obtain hands-on experience with the item you're examining. If you have to make a purchase urgently, for example if you forgot your wedding anniversary, you should not rely on the punctual delivery of a parcel. Believe me, it's better to rush to a local store, spend a couple of bucks more, and obtain a high quality gift, than to regret it later on. Also, you won't be alone in making your decision because that's what sales assistants are there for. They will help you pick the right item. And relax; you are not the first helpless person who doesn't know the exact size. Should you not be happy with the price, you can still bargain for a better deal or get something extra for free. Finally, during the holiday season, many stores grant extended return or exchange periods. So if you still made a mistake, you can undo it easily.

Taken together, you should rely on old-school shopping if you...

- are in a hurry with making the purchase
- need to try the item and make sure it's of good quality
- depend on expert advice for your decision
- enjoy to bargain
- demand good and personal service in the long run



Credits: Morning-theft via Flickr

HOW TO SHOP THE BEST DEAL SAFELY

To become a true pro shopper, you must combine online and offline shopping strategies. Here is a little guide to point you along the way. This is written with electronic devices in mind, but will work similarly for clothes, shoes or jewellery.

RULE #1: ASK THE INTERNET.

Let's say you would like to buy a new laptop. It's not a cheap item and you probably don't need it right now. No really, you don't. But since you're going to use it for some time, it is worth investing a little extra time and thought in the initial research process. Start by getting an overview of what features are available. And understand what they do. Then evaluate which features you will really need, which ones would be nice to have, and which ones you can definitely live without. Be honest. Now you have your minimum (need) and maximum (nice to have) requirements.

For ideas about a product range you can ask Google and see what it comes up with. If you need some pointers on how to search Google like a pro, check out my article <u>Master the Google Operands</u>. Alternatively, you can browse any of the following sites. These resources typically provide deeper insights and more details than the average person is patient enough to share with you.

CONSUMERSEARCH

	nersearch ve what you buy	We collect the best rev		analyze their picks	Home Blog Cell Phone Recommission What to	mend 🔎
Electronics Home & Gar	den Kitchen & Food F	Fitness & Sports Co	mputers & Internet	Family & Pets	Health & Beauty	Automotiv
Laptops: Reviews	_	Full Report	Ŧ	AA. TENT	in Print 🕑 EMP	ANL 🧭 SHARE
	- Contraction Contraction	INTRODUCTION		III Compare	All Laptops	News and A
Best gaming laptop		GAMING LAPTOPS	Expert & User Rev	iew Sources:	Recalls	4
Alienware M17	*	MULTIMEDIA LAPTOP			May 14th;	
		USEFUL LINKS	ducts some of the be-	st laptop testing, and	BATMERSON PROVIDENCE ST	
	For serious gamers, reviewers a performance of the 17-Inch Alier	OUR SOURCES	ves an Editors' Choice nware M17x. Todd	e award to the	From: U.S. (Product Saf	Consumer lety Commission

ConsumerSearch is an easy to navigate site that provides short overviews and full reports on a great range of products. Here you can find out about ultraportable laptops, binoculars, freezers or cat food. The "What To Look For" section highlights the key characteristics of this product category and you'll find it easy to come up with your minimal requirements based on these recommendations. The "Full Report" goes into details and usually comprises several chapters and links that lead to even more information. Besides providing background information, the site aggregates reviews from various sources including Gizmodo, PCMag.com, ConsumerReports.org, CNET, Amazon.com and About.com. Based on these reviews, the "Top x Best Reviewed" items are compiled for each product category. Finally, you can go ahead and compare prices for individual products.

CONSUMERREPORTS



Some parts of Consumer Reports are restricted to registered users. The membership is not free. However, the "Buying Advice" is freely accessible and very well written. Consumer Reports covers a similar selection of product categories as ConsumerSearch: Appliances, Electronics, Home & Garden, and Babies & Kids. You will find comprehensive but concise articles that give an overview of product types, explain every feature you can imagine, and introduce the major brands. Moreover, many product categories contain a buying guide video tutorial, which is far more comfortable to consume than text. The best section, however, is "Shopping tips". It contains invaluable leads and advice, which you should definitely consider before making your decision.

With these two sites and Google, you should quickly reach a decision regarding your minimum and maximum requirements. But beware!

RULE #2: GET WHAT YOU WANT!

If you take these requirements to a shop, they may try to sell you what they have. It's not necessarily the best item for you and more likely than not, it will not be the best deal. In an ideal world, price and quality should determine which of your requirements can be fulfilled, not the stock of your local department store.

So before you head out, continue your online research and make a preselection. Select all models that fulfill your requirements **and** have received good reviews. Using the product reviews and recommendations of ConsumerSearch and Consumer Reports, you may have picked some favorites already. But go ahead and query some more resources to see whether your selection hold true.

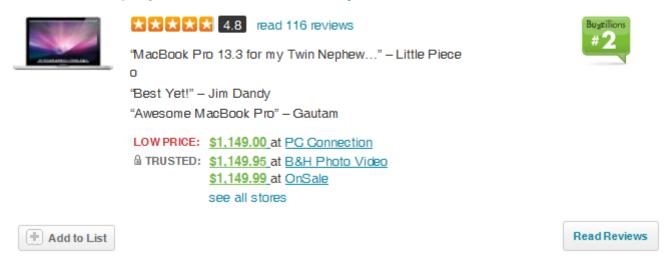
While you're at it, take note of what your desired models approximately cost online.

BUZZILLIONS

		e you					
ectronics	Computers	Sports	Home & Garden	Health & Beauty	Clothing	Shoes	Toys
			Entire Site	GO			
	iters > Laptop Con						
	views, Desi	for Mus	ic, Pros of Ligh	ntweight, Quality	display		
.aptops	views, b est	Laptops by Pros	ic, Pros of Ligr	Laptops by Use	Lapt	ops Other Criter	ia
.aptops by Brand	views, b esi	Laptops		Laptops	Lapt	ther Criter	ia
aptops by Brand HP (34) Acer (18)	views, b esi	Laptops by Pros Quiet (99		Laptops by Use	Lapt by C Lifes	other Criter	ia
aptops by Brand HP (34)	views, b esi	Laptops by Pros Quiet (99) ble keyboard (99)	Laptops by Use Video (101)	Lapt by C Lifes Price	other Criter	ia
aptops by Brand HP (34) Acer (18)	views, b esi	Laptops by Pros Quiet (99 Comforta) ble keyboard (99) (95)	Laptops by Use Video (101) Word processing (98)	Lapt by C Lifes Price	other Criter style e	ia

At Buzzillions you can rapidly select your minimum or maximum requirements from different categories and receive a list of matching products. The list can be sorted by rank, most reviewed, price, and novelty of the product.

Apple 13.3" MacBook Pro Intel Core 2 Duo 2.26GHz, 2GB RAM, 160GB Hard Drive, NVIDIA GeForce 9400M, SuperDrive - Aluminum unibody



Each product receives a short summary. Reviews as well as a list of "Where to Buy" to get the best deal are presented on separate pages. Furthermore, you can add favorite items to your personal list, which appears at the bottom of the page. And this leads us to a killer feature of this website.

	Apple 13.3" MacBook Pro Intel Core 2 Duo 2.26GHz, 2GB RAM, 160GB Hard Drive, N VIDIA GeForce 9400M, SuperDrive - Aluminum unibody	Acer 1410 Aspire 11.6" Notebook PC - Diamond Black
Avg. Product Rating	★★★★ 4.8 (116 reviews)	★★★★★ 4.6 (40 reviews)
Category Average	4.3 stars	4.3 stars
Overall Reviewer Recommendation	95%	95%
Price	\$1,149.00 - \$1,499.00	\$429.99 - \$450.00
Reviewed by		
Tech savvy	18%	80%
Pros		
Quiet	17%	88%

Once you have selected a couple of products, you can click the respective button in the list to compare your picks side by side. These data are incredibly useful in further downsizing your list and selecting only the products that best suit your need.

Buzzillions is not limited to Electronics and Computers. It also contains information and reviews on several more categories: Sports, Home & Garden, Health & Beauty, Clothing, Shoes, Toys, Baby, and Books. Should you be looking for gifts, this tool may work quite well as a recommendation engine.

PRODUCTWIKI

ProductWiki Product	s Recent Changes	Join PWI 🚮 Sign in	
Home > Computers > Laptops			
sort by Popular		1 to 34 of 34	Intel Core 2 Duo Multimedia
	UL80Vt		Manufacturer
1.6	P \$849.00 Released November, 2009 includes Windows 7 great battery life - 11.5 hours claimed for all day	ProSCORE 88	Toshiba (16) Sony (9)
Con	computing • HDMI output • loaded with Asus bloatware • low power ULV Intel processor - slow core speeds		HP (5) Asus (2)
	are poor for intense applications • cheap high gloss plastic enclosure		Lenovo (1) Gigabyte (1)

Being a ProductWiki, the content of this site is managed entirely by its audience. And it features one of the longest product category lists of all sites mentioned here. To access this list, select products. But you can also search the wiki for a specific product.

Once landed in your desired product category, you'll notice the list of features to the right. This is where you can again select your minimum or maximum requirements and filter out only matching products. The options appear to be far more refined than on the previous page. However, ProductWiki is lacking the possibility to compare selected products.

Pros & Cons Reviews Details Buy It	Competitors	6 Related Commer	Gallery twitte	er
ProSCORE 88	i <mark>xed</mark> posi	tive 2 positive 0 mixed 0 negative	How is the ProSCORI	E calculated?
O Pros: D)o you agree?	Cons:	Do	you agree?
• includes Windows 7	+4 🛆 🖓	 loaded with Asus b 	loatware	+2 🛆 🖓
 great battery life - 11.5 hours claimed for all day computing 	+4 🖒 🔽		el processor - slow core or intense applications	+1 🛆 🖓
HDMI output	+4 🛆 🖓	• cheap high gloss p	olastic enclosure	+1 🛆 🖓
• multi-touch trackpad	+4 🛆 🖓	• crappy dimpled tra	ockpad - same plastic	0 🛆 🖓

The product page holds all available details about the item. Especially the Pros & Cons and the list of Competitors are highly valuable. The Where to Buy (best deal) guide is provided by PriceGrabber and you can easily fetch prices for the UK, US, and Canada.

Expo

	BXP) ®	SEARCH FROM 307,172 VIDEO RI	EVIEWS	Q	
All Products Electronics Kitchen & Housewares Computers Baby & Kids Featured Brands	All Products	Electronics	Kitchen & Housewares	Computers	Baby & Kids	Featured Brands

Reviews > Computers & Accessories > Laptops & Accessories > PC Laptops

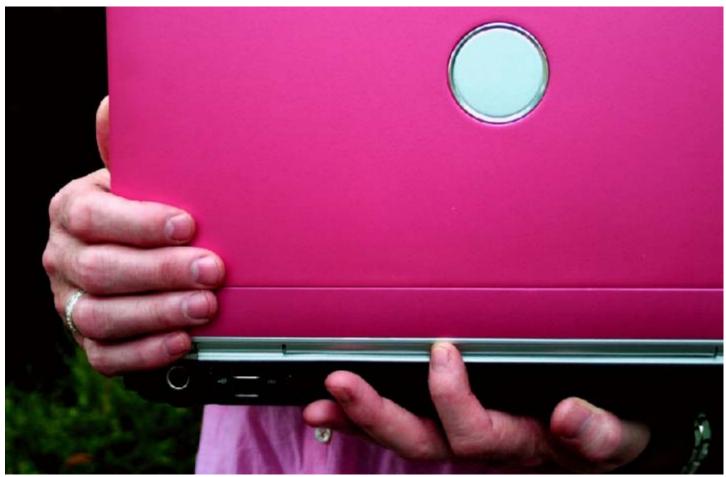
Expo is an online community that focuses on product video reviews. The reviews are provided by the site's members. Don't expect professional advertisements. The videos are amateurish, yet clear and most importantly, honest.

Browse PC Laptops	618 VIDEO REVIEWS
Refine results	Featured Most Viewed Highest Rated Most Reviewed
Brand Hewlett-Packard (4)	reatured most florida mightest flated most florida
Sony (3)	Dell XPS M1530 Notebook
Toshiba (3)	Video Reviews: 4
Dell (2)	Average Roduct Rating: ****
Gateway (2)	
Lenovo (1)	Compare prices
Display Size	
13.1 - 14 inch (2)	HP Pavilion DV9030US 17-inch Notebook
15.1 - 16 inch (7)	
16.1 - 17 inch (2)	Video Reviews: 1 Average Roduct Rating:
Processor Type	12 (CH106895)
Ocore 2 Duo	Compare prices
Processor Speed	
1.50 GHz - 1.60 GHz (1)	
1.61 GHz - 1.70 GHz (3)	Dell Latitude E6400 Laptop
1.91 GHz - 2.00 GHz (2)	Video Reviews: 1
More than 2.0 GHz (1)	Average Roduct Rating: ****
Hard Drive	Compare prices
🔵 150 GB - 199 GB	A CONTRACTOR OF A

Similar to the previous two sites, you can refine search results by selecting certain specs from a list. You can then sort the results by four different criteria: Featured, Most Viewed, Highest Rated, and Most Reviewed. Finally, you can watch the video reviews and compare prices.

RULE #3: TRY BEFORE YOU BUY.

Now that you know what you want, you can head out and visit a local store. Seeing, touching, and testing different laptops will make the decision of which model to get a lot easier.



Credits: pinksherbet via Flickr

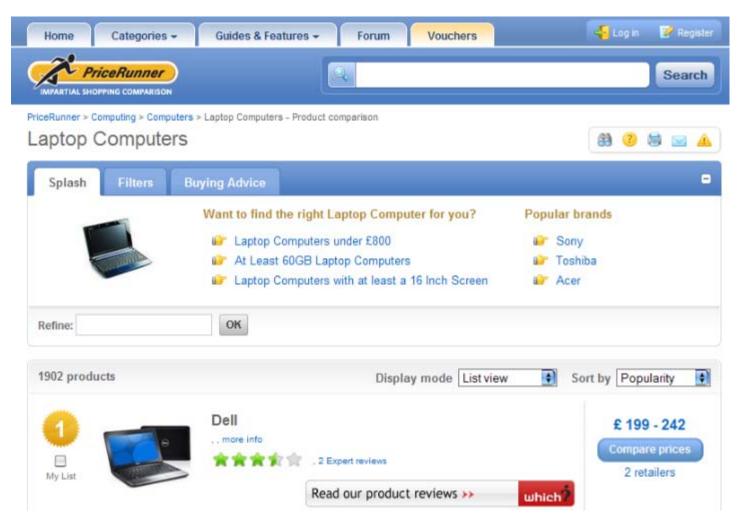
Once you have seen all your favorite models and fell in love with one of them, you have two options: you can either go back home and get the best deal online or you can play it safe (i.e. immediately satisfy your need) and buy from your local trusted dealer. Having gathered information about what the new computer would cost online, at least puts you in a great position for bargaining.

RULE #4: COMPARE PRICES.

Unless you have already been convinced, this is the time to seriously compare prices and hunt down the best deal. Of course, for obvious reasons, it may still be your local trusted dealer.

Comparing prices is a tricky business. Since MakeUseOf readers are spread across the globe, this guide cannot recommend just one site. However, introducing one price search engine for every major country would exhaust the capacity of both this guide and its author. Hence, here is a single **example** of what to expect from a price comparing website and how to use it. Please find a suitable tool for you, for example on <u>MakeUseOf</u>. Also, several of the websites mentioned above feature price comparison.

PRICERUNNER



PriceRunner provides impartial price comparison for the UK (link above), <u>France</u>, <u>Germany</u>, <u>Austria</u>, <u>Sweden</u>, and <u>Denmark</u>. You need to make your country selection on the bottom left.

If you are looking for the price of a specific item, simply enter the product name in the search field and hit "Search". If the product name wasn't conclusive, this will give you a list of items. Click "Compare prices" for the item you want. You'll be directed to the product page, which contains a list of online stores and what they charge. Note how much you'll pay for shipping, as it can decide the best price

For the <u>US</u> and <u>Germany</u>, Google product search is a great tool. Unfortunately, it's not yet available for each and every country.

Not every price comparison site automatically knows the best price for each and every item. Thus, you must compare prices using several sources. You will find more price comparing websites in the <u>MakeUseOf Directory</u>. Readers are welcome to submit more useful and yet missing websites and tools to the Directory.

FREESHIPPING.ORG

• FREESHIPPING.org	e Shipping Coupons to 1961 Store	Enter Store Name	0
Free Shipping Coupons Compare Prices My f Stores Soon to Expire Most Recent	avorite Coupons Go Frugal Blog		Press eBook Contact
Free Shipping Coupon Alerts Hide Enter Email Address subscribe	amazon.com. BABies	Coldwater Creek	VOLINS IS HERE
Free Shipping By Store Hide	JCPennëy KOH	LS *Macys	Sears
N Q P Q R S I U V W X Y Z Select any store		GET. Toys, US	VICTORIA'S SECRET

Finding the cheapest price isn't everything. I have mentioned previously, that fees for shipping can make the difference. The best stores of course are those that don't charge for shipping. Amazon has made free shipping popular and many other merchants followed suit.

FreeShipping.org provides free shipping coupons for almost two thousand stores. This service is also available for Canada: <u>FreeShipping.ca</u>

Every year, just before Christmas, FreeShipping organizes a <u>Free Shipping Day</u>. In 2009, hundreds of merchants have participated to guarantee free shipping and delivery before Christmas Day, for orders made on the Free Shipping Day.

You can save even more money, for example using coupons or special discounts. Additionally, you can watch prices for specific items and make your purchase only when your desired value has been reached. Please see the following articles on MakeUseOf for pointers:

Sharninder on May 25th, 2009 5 Online Shopping Sites That Will Actually SAVE You Money

John McClain on Aug. 30th, 2009 Top 10 Sites for Online Coupons & Promotional Codes

Mark O'Neill on Sep. 13th, 2008 Watch Online Products for Price Drops with ShoppingNotes Finding the best price is one thing. But finding one of a time deals is a whole different story. It's nothing more than chance, but worth a try.

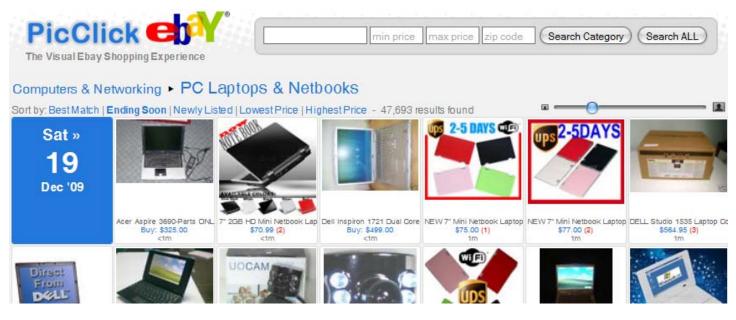
WAREHOUSE DEALS

wareh	ouse deals	Deep discounts on o	pen-bo	x and like-new products from	n Amazon.com _{Help}
	™amazon	search Warehouse Dea	als 💽	Type in what you're looking for	GO Cart
Just Arrived	Deep Discounts	Last-Chance Deals	FREE S	HIPPING on most orders over \$25 (Le	earn More) AmazonPri
Electronics & Com					
Jackpot	HDT	V Blowout!			
Televisions		e carefully tested and	no.		
Blu-ray & DVD		to ensure you get			C/A
Video Games		at a great price.			81
Kindle	SHOP HD	TV DEALS			

Amazon operates a warehouse with major discounts on open-box, refurbished or gently-used products from Amazon.com. Buyers receive the same benefits and satisfaction guarantee they are used to from the main site.

We all know that the most incredible deals can be made on eBay each and every day. There are various tools to discover items sorted into the wrong categories or with bad spelling. eBay operates in over 30 countries. A complete list can be found on the bottom of the <u>US start page</u>.

PICCLICK



PicClick is a visual search engine for eBay. From the start site you dive into the categories, where you can sort items by criteria such as "Best Match", "Ending Soon" or "Lowest Price". You can also search based on your ZIP code or price range. The tool is available for <u>Australia</u>, Belgium (<u>Dutch</u> and <u>French</u>), <u>Canada</u>, <u>France</u>, <u>Germany</u>, <u>India</u>, <u>Italy</u>, <u>Netherlands</u>, <u>Spain</u>, <u>United Kingdom</u>, and <u>United States</u>.

RULE #5: SHOP SAFELY

Whether you buy online or offline, the best price isn't always the best choice. Be sure to buy from a reliable shop, evaluate all extras and bonuses (e.g. warranty, return and service options), and select a safe payment method.

PICKING AN ONLINE STORE

There are some pitfalls of online shopping you should be aware of. A cheap price for example, may turn out to be not so cheap once shipping & handling fees are added. Hence, watch out for extra costs. Overnight shipping may not be overnight at all. Be sure to check disclaimers, especially if you have to rely on a speedy delivery. The terms of service is a touchy subject in general. No one has the time or patience to read them, but that's where the drawbacks are hidden. Can you return the item? If yes, within what time frame? What happens if you need to have it exchanged or repaired? Will you have to pay extra for these services? How long is it going to take? Are you going to receive a replacement in the meantime? Is customer service available and how responsive are these people? And finally, how are they going to handle your private data?

In short, you must watch out for ...

- shipping & handling fees
- warranties (replacement and repair policies)
- refund and return policies
- legal statements
- privacy policies



Credits: ackook via Flickr

If you're not able to read the TOS, you should shop at well known online stores only. They have a reputation to lose and will most likely offer fair service. If you're still unsure, buy from Amazon as their delivery times are highly reliable. Alsoreturn policies and customer service are very generous. Surprisingly, they often have highly competitive prices and offer free shipping on top of that.

What you should really be concerned about is the method of payment and safety-related issues in using either one of these methods.

COMPUTER AND BROWSER SECURITY

Needless to say, you must secure your computer and your browser to be protected from worms, phishing attacks and the like. Several articles on MakeUseOf cover this topic. The following article describes the bare essentials:

Aibek on Feb. 26th, 2009 7 Essential Security Downloads You MUST Have Installed

SECURE INTERNET CONNECTION

A secure internet connection must be used when sending sensitive information, such as credit card or bank information. Using this technology, the data will be scrambled, protecting it from anyone trying to read and misuse it.

Once you enter the ordering and payment process, make sure you were directed to a secure internet connection. This is not something you can initiate, it should happen automatically. However, you can easily recognize a secure internet connection. The web address should change from starting with "http://" to starting with "https://". The "s" behind "http" (<u>hypertext transfer protocol</u>) indicates a "secure" connection using SSL/TLS protocols for encryption and secure server identification. Furthermore, you should see a closed lock or an unbroken key in the status bar (typically in the bottom left) of your browser window.

METHODS OF PAYMENT

There are three major options: bank transfer, credit card, and PayPal. And then there are options to PayPal: Google Checkout and Amazon Payments.

A) BANK TRANSFER

This is the safest method of payment, since you do not reveal your bank details to the internet or at least you restrict it to your online banking activity. Keep in mind though that generally your items won't be shipped until payment has arrived. Some shops, however, may issue a bill, which may be paid after you received the delivery. In this case, you should definitely rely on bank transfer.

B) CREDIT CARD

Meanwhile, federal laws make credit card payments rather safe. In case of abuse, a US credit card owner is liable for a maximum of \$50. However, these regulations may vary depending on your country and what kind of credit card you are using. Apart from that, many credit card issuers grant extended warranties or other benefits upon making payments with their cards. You should thoroughly review the terms of service of your credit card issuer to be aware of your liabilities, rights, and potential benefits.



Credits: andresrueda via Flickr

C) <u>PAYPAL</u>

PayPal



PayPal provides an extra layer of protection. It manages your credit card or bank data and you can make payments to online shops using your email address. In other words, you share your sensitive information only with PayPal, rather than with a dozen different merchants. You can add several credit cards, use direct debits from your bank account or pay from your PayPal balance, which can be topped up by transferring money to your PayPal account.

Using PayPal for payments is free. Receiving money is a different story, which I will not touch within this guide. PayPal provides <u>buyer protection</u> for purchases made on eBay and other merchants' websites. If you do not receive your order, if the item is broken or doesn't hold up to the description, PayPal will cover the full amount including postage. Here is a <u>list of stores</u> where you can shop safely using PayPal.

Alternatives to PayPal are Google Checkout and Amazon Payments.

SAFESHOPPING.ORG

safeshopp	oing <mark>≙ org</mark>	*
Menu • Home • Security • Privacy • Payment • Seller • Product • Terms • Delivery	Seller: What Do You Know About The Seller? • The Seller • Spam • The Individual • The Address • International Buying • Company Experience • Authorized Seller • Still Selling	

Please refer to SafeShopping.org for more information on safe online shopping. The site provides details on many issues discussed above and much more.

You will also find further information on secure online shopping in the following MakeUseOf articles

Ryan Dube on Mar. 5th, 2009 How to Keep Your Credit Cards Safe When Shopping Online

Ryan Dube on Jan. 9th, 2009 How to Keep Your PayPal Account Safe from Hackers

Aibek on Feb. 29th, 2008 <u>9 Tools PayPal Users Should Know About</u>

Karl L. Gechlik on Aug. 9th, 2008 Amazon Payments – The new PayPal alternative from Amazon

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- <u>www.makeuseof.com</u>(latest articles)
- www.makeuseof.com/dir/(browser cool websites by category)
- www.makeuseof.com/most-popular/(most popular articles)
- http://feedproxy.google.com/Makeuseof(feed)
- http://feedburner.google.com/fb/a/mailverify?uri=Makeuseof&loc=en_US(subscribe via email)

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