

Consumer Corner

Are You Shopping Online With A Reputable Retailer?

(NAPSA)—Today, almost anyone can establish an e-commerce site, using simple tools that are available online. How does a consumer know that he or she is shopping online at the site of a reputable retailer?

Just as positive word of mouth and a secure environment would put you at ease when visiting a brick-and-mortar shop, there are important factors in evaluating the reputation of online stores, as well.

Howard A. Schmidt, international information security and cyber crime investigations expert, former special adviser for cyberspace security for the White House and former eBay and Microsoft chief information security officer, recommends three actions you can take to help ensure that you buy from reputable online storefronts:

1. Read reviews from other consumers. Increasingly, sites for retailers, restaurants and other consumer-oriented companies are including reviews or ratings that are written by their customers. These reviews, especially when validated by services such as RatePoint.com, give a good idea of the shopping experience you can expect at the site and of the retailer's responsiveness to any issues that may arise. This feedback can be valuable in judging the quality of products offered for sale, identifying any safety problems and judging the overall reputation of the company.

2. Look for good customer service tools on the site. A reputable retailer will provide promi-



nent links to its return and exchange policies and its privacy policy, as well as an e-mail link for sending questions and a toll-free phone number. Some advanced sites enable you to chat live with a customer service representative.

3. Ensure your transactions are secure. Make sure that the site is secure and that any credit card information or personal information you're submitting is encrypted. Most current browsers will indicate a secure site by displaying a green address bar. Alternatively, you can also look for the closed padlock symbol on your browser, which is located in various places on your browser. Some appear during checkout to confirm that a site is secure.

"Buying from a reputable retailer can make online shopping safer and fun, while eliminating much of the shopping hassle that we face in trying to decide where to buy," says Schmidt. "Be proactive in checking the reputation of those from whom you buy, and make sure you provide your own review after you shop."