

ConsumerAlert

Are You Protected When Holiday Shopping Online?

(NAPSA)—With the chaos of the holiday season, many will likely turn to online shopping to save time and sanity. However, as cyber-shopping increases, so do concerns about whom to trust online: Is there a real business behind that site with the rock-bottom prices? Is that really my favorite clothing store I'm viewing through my browser, or a front for scam artists?

The fear is of phishing: Web sites that falsely claim to be an established business and sell counterfeit products or trick users into giving away personal information.

This holiday season, numerous phishing scams will attempt to lure online shoppers to fraudulent Web sites. A recent survey conducted by Harris Interactive on behalf of Microsoft Corp. found that nearly a quarter (22 percent) of U.S. adults either have personally been a victim of a phishing attack within the past year or know someone who has.*

"Phishing is a serious and growing threat to online shoppers, especially during the holidays," said Jim Hahn, product manager for the Windows Client Team at Microsoft. "It's important for shoppers to be armed with the right tools and knowledge when they purchase gifts online. Part of the solution is to make sure users have as much information as possible about the site they are visiting so they can make informed decisions when entering financial information. To help provide this information, Microsoft supports a new technology called Extended Validation SSL Certificates (EV Certs) in Internet Explorer 7."

Site's Identity Is Confirmed

When an Internet user visits a site that has received an EV Certificate, Internet Explorer 7 will confirm the site's identity by turning the address bar green and prominently displaying the site owner's identity information.

Each site that has received an EV Cert has undergone a business check and proved its identity is authentic. The identity information displayed through EV Certs reflects that the site has earned an advanced level of business confirmation. This enables consumers to have more confidence that they are not releasing personal data to a cleverly disguised phishing site.

"As many of us turn to the Internet to do our shopping this holiday season, we should look for the green bar for additional information when entering personal data or purchasing gifts online," Hahn said.

In early September, more than 3,000 retail sites were live with an EV Cert, including PayPal, eBay, UBS, HSBC's First Direct, E*Trade (Australia), AutoZone and CompUSA.

To learn more about online security and Internet Explorer 7, visit www.microsoft.com.

* This study was conducted online by Harris Interactive on behalf of Microsoft between Oct. 30 and Nov. 1, 2007, among 2,351 U.S. adults ages 18 and older, of whom 2,281 have a home computer and 899 have a wireless network at home to connect their computer to the Internet. No estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. A full methodology can be obtained by contacting Microsoft.