

Internet Shopping Tips

Going New Places

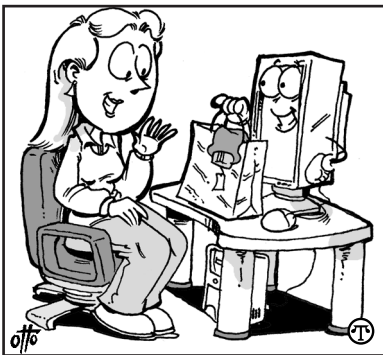
(NAPSA)—To find some of the Web's best bargains and most unusual merchandise, it can pay to venture past the online mega-stores and shop some of the smaller merchants. The rewards include more personal service, more unusual goods and competitive prices aimed at making you a return customer.

How can you trust an unknown shopping site to deliver on its promises?

"Trust is an important part of the shopping experience, especially when you are trying out a new merchant," says Shannon Clouston, Shopping.com's Chief Shopper. Now a part of the eBay family of companies, her company lets shoppers compare prices and products from stores of all sizes across the globe.

Clouston says that customer reviews are often the best guide for determining which stores to trust. "One of the biggest advantages of shopping on the Web is that a merchant's reputation is in plain sight," she says. "When you walk into a regular store, it's hard to tell whether previous customers are loyal fans or have vowed never to return again. With online shopping, those comments—bad and good—are there for everyone to see."

One of the best-known sources for merchant ratings, are the Epinions reviews found on Shopping.com. Shoppers rate stores on a one-to-five "check" scale, often giving a detailed account of what they bought, what they liked and disliked about the store, and whether they would buy there again. You can not only read the reviews, but also reorder the list-



Shoppers can compare prices and products on one Internet site.

ings, putting the most positive, most negative or most recent reviews on top.

In addition, the site awards its Trusted Store blue ribbon seal to merchants who consistently receive positive customer ratings and reviews, provide accurate information and honor their price listings without excuses.

Clouston says that shoppers should also look at how merchants secure the private information of its customers. "Whether we're talking about credit card numbers, e-mail addresses or other privileged information, merchants have an almost sacred duty to keep this data secure," she says.

At Shopping.com, consumers can be certain they are protected because of the rigorous process the company takes to ensure its merchants go the extra mile when it comes to security and a positive experience. "With so many great online merchants to choose from, shopping has never been more fun," Clouston says. "And now you can feel confident that it's safe, too."