

Computer Security Tips – **Do You (Or Should You) Shop Online?**

by Syd Tash

© 2008 all rights reserved

The Christmas season will soon be upon us, along with the usual shopping frenzy, both online and off. Shopping online is quick and easy, and can save you a lot of time and frustration. So is it safe? It is estimated that 40% of the population in western countries have bought something online. Perhaps you are one of them; if not, should you be?

These days, buying something online is almost always an easy, pleasurable experience, if you keep a few things in mind. The most obvious thing which you have no doubt heard many times is this: never enter any sensitive information unless you are on a secure page.

A secure web page is one that begins with <https://...> and you see a little gold padlock on the upper or lower part of your screen, although this is not absolutely foolproof.

Next, look at the company's Privacy Policy, for assurances that your data will never be sold, traded or revealed. When signing in to a shopping site, do not select the "Remember me" option, or "Keep me signed in unless I sign out", or "Remember my password", etc. Be especially careful not to allow the site to store your credit card number.

You have probably noticed that some sites you visit often, are personalized for you, with your name or items of interest to you. You may know that this is done with cookies.

To block cookies from a particular site in Internet Explorer, click Tools, Internet Options, Privacy tab, Sites. Enter the address of the web site to block, and click Block. Click OK, OK. In Firefox, click Tools, Options, Privacy, Exceptions. Enter the web address and click Block. Click Close, OK.

You can also sign in to your account on the shopping site, and look for something like Account Preferences, Profile, View Orders, etc. Look for something resembling Browsing History, then look for an option to turn it off.

Of course, if you feel an account is accumulating too much info on you, just delete it. Block its cookie as above, then open a new account.

Use a credit card for your purchases, not a debit card or echeck. Visa, Mastercard and American Express offer various protections to users in case of difficulties, so credit cards are somewhat safer. Debit cards and echecks give access to your bank account. Credit cards do not.

Be careful with desktop search programs. Many of them cache or store those secure web pages we talked about above. The pages may include what you have ordered, as well as, you guessed it, your credit card number. To prevent this, look for a Preferences setting for secure pages, or https, or web history. Disable it.

These few precautions will help ensure you have a wonderful Christmas shopping season. Stay alert on the web, use common sense, keep your security programs up to date and you will be fine. So let me be the very first to wish you Merry Christmas!

Syd Tash is a noted computer security consultant, author and founder of The **SaferSurfing Project**. Want more useful articles like this? Get Syd's new **free** ebook, chock full of tips, fixes, updates and information. Hop on over here: => <http://SaferSurfingProject.com/>

You may freely reprint, publish or distribute this article provided it remains intact and complete, with no changes whatsoever, and includes the author's bio box above.