

Holiday Shoppers Beware: Avoiding Fraud When Shopping Online With 10 Tips From AutoTrader.com

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ATLANTA, Nov. 9 [/PRNewswire/](#) -- With the holiday season rapidly approaching, more and more consumers will be turning to the Web to purchase gifts for family and friends. According to the National Retail Federation(1), nearly half of consumers plan to use the Internet to purchase holiday gifts this year. But these shoppers need to be aware and prepared for a very real concern when surfing the Web - online fraud.

In conjunction with International Fraud Awareness Week (November 8 to 14), AutoTrader.com, the Internet's largest auto classifieds marketplace, is setting out to help educate consumers on how to protect themselves when shopping online.

"The Internet has made shopping easier than ever, even for high-ticket items such as homes and vehicles," says renowned fraud prevention expert Sid Kirchheimer, author of *Scam Proof Your Life*. "But with this increased convenience comes a growing number of scams, especially during the busy holiday shopping season, and there's a greater need for people to learn what to look out for and how to protect themselves."

AutoTrader.com has partnered with Kirchheimer to help consumers learn how to protect themselves from online fraud. The company is dedicated to providing its visitors with a safe environment for shopping for new, certified pre-owned, and used cars and sharing information on how to safely shop online for any item.

Kirchheimer offers the following online fraud awareness tips when shopping online for any item:

- **Research Prices.** When researching cars and other big-ticket items for sale online, similar items typically fall into a general price range. If one falls way below that range, be suspicious. Scammers use ridiculously low prices to lure consumers to their ads. If a deal seems too good to be true, it probably is.
- **Don't Fall For Sob Stories.** Beware of "act now" low-ball price offers accompanied with a story that speaks of some hardship on the seller's part - such as a soldier needing to sell a car quickly before being deploying to Iraq, or a recent divorcee wanting to sell her husband's belongings. These bogus ruses usually just empty your wallet, as the items typically don't exist.
- **Don't Rush.** A seller pushing to rush a transaction could be trying to prey on a consumer's desire for the item.
- **Watch for "Scammer Grammar."** Many scammers posting fraudulent ads are based overseas, and English is not their native tongue. In online ads or in email correspondence, watch for frequent misspellings, misused words or other errors not likely to be made by someone fluent in English.
- **Make Phone Contact.** Be suspicious of sellers who only want to correspond by email - and are not willing to provide a telephone contact number.

- **No Wire Transfers!** A wire transfer is the quickest way to lose money - especially if it's sent overseas, outside the jurisdiction of U.S. officials. If buying a car or another large item locally, make an in-person transaction with cash, money order or another method sanctioned by a bank. If buying from a more distant seller, talk to a bank or reputable escrow service about ways to safely conduct this transaction.
- **Never Go Alone.** When meeting a seller to look at a car or other big-ticket items or to conclude the transaction, always go with a friend and, if possible, meet in a public place during the day.
- **Don't Go Off-Site.** Many scammers cruise reputable online auction sites, but may entice you to go offline for a similar item. Others will email a link to another site, claiming that it is helping with the transaction. But once you leave a reputable site, your vulnerability to a financial swindle or identity theft increases.
- **See the Product.** Many scammers post ads for cars and other items that don't even exist - they simply steal the pictures and descriptions from other sources. When buying any high-ticket item, insist that you see it in person, get proof it is owned by the seller and be able to have it inspected before any money is exchanged.
- **Use Common Sense.** If a shopping experience does not feel right, pay attention to the warning signs and verify that the site and seller are safe before proceeding with the transaction.

"It's easy to fall into a trap when shopping online if you're not prepared or don't know what to look out for," said Keely Funkhouser, director of fraud prevention strategies at AutoTrader.com. "But by following just a few simple tips, consumers can be more confident and careful when using the Web to make any online purchases."

To learn more about avoiding fraud when shopping, buying or selling online, visit www.autotrader.com/fraudtips.

About AutoTrader.com

AutoTrader.com, created in 1997 and headquartered in Atlanta, Ga., is the Internet's leading auto classifieds marketplace and consumer information website. AutoTrader.com aggregates in a single location millions of [new cars](#), [used cars](#) and [certified pre-owned cars](#) from thousands of auto dealers and private owners. The site attracts about 15 million unique monthly visitors. Through innovative merchandising functionality such as multiple photos, videos, detailed descriptions and comprehensive research and compare tools, AutoTrader.com unites new and used car buyers and sellers online to improving the way people research, locate and advertise vehicles. AutoTrader.com is a majority-owned subsidiary of Cox Enterprises. The venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers is also an investor. For more information, please visit www.autotrader.com.

1) National Retail Federation 2009 Holiday Survey.
http://www.nrf.com/modules.php?name=Pages&sp_id=1130

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