



Avoid Scams and Frauds This Holiday Season

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MADISON, Wis. – The holidays are a busy time for Wisconsin consumers, and scammers are eager to take advantage of the hustle and bustle. Scammers want to steal consumers' money and personal information, and they know the best tricks to do it. It is important that consumers know how to identify and avoid common scams before a fraudster tries to ruin their holiday season, as prevention is the best protection from being scammed.

Online Marketplace Scams: If a consumer shops for holiday gifts through classified ads or an online peer-to-peer marketplace, they might find some great deals. However, they must also be careful of scams. Fraudsters list all sorts of items and services to lure in consumers and steal their money or private information. Consumers should practice caution when shopping for popular holiday gifts and deals like pets, pre-owned event tickets, and vacation rentals.

To avoid online marketplace scams, consumers should avoid paying up-front for anything sold through these platforms. Communications should stay on the app or website the listing is posted to and, if possible, consumers should meet with online sellers in-person before giving them money. Consumers should try to verify a seller is real before they buy from them, only buy expensive items (like event tickets) from official vendors with established policies for cancellations and refunds, and avoid renting lodging directly from a stranger on social media by instead booking through an official website or trusted app.

Phishing Messages: Consumers may receive texts, emails, or direct messages on social media platforms which seem to come from a well-known retailer or shipping company. The messages claim there is an issue with a purchase or return, and the consumer needs to verify their personal information in order for the product to be delivered or for the consumer to get their money back. These are phishing scams designed to trick consumers into giving their personal information to scammers.

If a consumer receives one of these messages, they should ignore it and delete it – even if the message seems to come from a familiar company. Consumers should avoid opening links and instead visit a company's official website to check for notifications about a delayed delivery or problems with a return.

Non-Delivery Scams: When consumers make a purchase online, it usually comes with an expected shipping date. Some scammers sell items online but have no physical products to ship at all. They make money off consumers who forget about their purchase or who do not want to deal with the return process. If a consumer does ask for their money back, fraudulent sellers make excuses, tell them to keep waiting, or cut off communications. They sometimes create very restrictive return policies that are intended to discourage refunds.

To avoid non-delivery scams, consumers can shop with trustworthy online retailers that verify sellers and guarantee refunds in cases of non-delivery, independently research a seller and their products to check what others are saying about them online, and carefully read a seller's return policy before making the purchase to determine whether they are worth doing business with.

Gift Card Scams: This payment method is popular during the holidays, but gift cards are for giving – not for making payments to unfamiliar people or organizations. Scammers often ask to be paid with gift cards because they are difficult to track or refund. To avoid gift card scams, consumers should never buy and send gift cards or gift card numbers to someone requesting them. Even if that person appears to be someone the consumer knows, they could secretly be an imposter scammer.

Gift cards are sometimes tampered with by thieves before being sold to consumers in stores. This results in the consumer buying a card but being unable to use it, since the thief already has the card numbers. If buying a gift card in-store, consumers should try to purchase a card that is fully enclosed in undamaged packaging, and inspect the card for fake barcode stickers before paying.

For more information and consumer protection resources or to file a complaint, visit DATCP's Consumer Protection webpage at [ConsumerProtection.wi.gov](https://www.consumerprotection.wi.gov) or contact the Consumer Protection Hotline at (800) 422-7128 or DATCPHotline@wisconsin.gov.

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