


Physical safety, digital danger

Many of us try to support our local shops, but with worries about COVID-19 it is understandable that some want to stay safe by doing their Christmas shopping online.

Be careful, though, that you don't exchange physical safety for digital danger. Online purchases come with risks and you need to ensure you don't fall victim to them and have your money, identity, credit card or bank details stolen.

Here are the top five tips from the police's cybercrime advisors to bear in mind:

1. When it is time to pay for your items online, check there is a closed padlock icon in the browser's address bar (circled here), and the page's address begins with "https://".

2. Make sure that your really important accounts (such as your email and online shopping accounts) are protected by strong passwords you don't use anywhere else.
3. Be aware of phishing (pronounced "fishing"). Many messages you receive about amazing offers will contain links to fake websites intended to trick you into giving away your details. Another scam is where you receive an email (or call) after a purchase saying there is "a problem". These are likely examples of phishing. Call or visit your retailer's website directly instead of responding to mysterious contacts like these.
4. Buying from an online shop you haven't used before? Then carry out some research first, or ask friends or family if they've used the site and about their experiences.
5. Be cautious if any website asks you for details that are not required for your purchase, such as your mother's maiden name or the name of your first pet.

Another tip from me: be sure that what is advertised is exactly what you expect to buy and not a counterfeit or cheap copy. Check other people's reviews of the product if these are available.

An important way to stay safe online is not to do any important business when connected to a free, unsecure Wi-Fi signal – for example, the one available in a cafe or shop. This includes online shopping and checking your bank balance. Do the purchase back home via your own secure connection instead.

So you've bought something online – what about delivery? It seems many delivery drivers are now incapable of pressing a door bell and just leave the package on your doorstep. Some of the better couriers will send a text or email when delivery has been made, but many do not. If you think you will be out when the delivery is due, consider having your package delivered to one of the many collection points in the borough if that option is available from the seller. The package is safe and you can collect at your convenience. Most sellers give you this option free of charge.

As always, if you have any doubts, then take a pause, count to six and look again at what you are about to do.

Woking Neighbourhood Watch wishes you a safe and happy Christmas.