

BBB Tip: Shop safe and shop smart this holiday season!

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The 2023 holiday shopping season promises to be an unpredictable one. High inflation rates and increased prices of consumer goods are already throwing a wrench into holiday shopping. Electronics, toys, and other products will be (or already are) in short supply, and retailers are struggling to staff up as the shopping season nears.

Just like in 2022, people are planning to start their holiday shopping early. Watch out for deals well before Black Friday sales. Retailers are also expecting to see even more people shopping online.

Product shortages and increased online shopping are likely to result in even more online purchase scams this year. These scams accounted for more than 56% of all scams reported to BBB Scam Tracker in 2022, according to the 2022 BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report. Shortages are likely to make purchase scams even more common as desperate shoppers turn to shady websites in hopes of finding this year's must-have gift.

BBB recommends the following tips to “Shop Safe, Shop Smart” this holiday season:

- **Research before you buy.** Use BBB.org and shopper reviews to do your homework before paying. Also, read our tips for spotting phony reviews.
- **If the deal looks too good to be true, it probably is.** The top motivating factor for people who made a purchase and lost money was the price. Don't shop on price alone.
- **Beware of fake websites.** Check the URL, watch for bad grammar, research the age of the domain, and search for contact information. See BBB's tips for identifying a fake website.
- **Professional photos do not mean it's a real offer.** Respondents reported that website photos motivated them to engage with scammers, especially for pets/pet supplies, clothing/accessories, and vehicles.
- **Make sure the website is secure.** Look for the “HTTPS” in the URL (the extra s is for “secure”) and a small lock icon on the address bar. Never enter payment or personal information into a website with only “HTTP” – it is NOT secure.
- **Be careful purchasing sought-after products, especially during the holiday season.** The risk of online purchase scams rises during the holidays because more people are making online purchases, and scammers offer the most popular products for the season at great prices.
- **Beware of making quick purchases while scrolling through social media.** Scammers have access to tools they need to learn about your buying behaviors, offering exactly what you want at enticingly low prices.
- **Look for the BBB seal.** BBB Accredited Businesses pledge to uphold the BBB Standards for Trust and to deal fairly with consumers. If a business displays a BBB seal, verify it by going to BBB.org.
- **Use secure and traceable transactions and payment methods.** According to BBB's research, those who paid with a credit card were less likely to lose money. Be cautious when paying by digital wallet apps, prepaid money cards, or other non-traditional payment methods. Learn more about payment types and how to use each safely.
- **Shipment tracking information can be faked.** Look closely to make sure it is a legitimate business. Avoid clicking on the tracking link; go to the shipper's website and type in the code to see if it is real.
Count on BBB to help you “Shop Safe, Shop Smart.” More tips are available at BBB.org/holiday-tips.
- **Report unsatisfactory purchase experiences to BBB.** If you are unhappy with a purchase, file a complaint at BBB.org/complaints. If you never got what you paid for, consider reporting it to [BBB Scam Tracker](http://BBB.org/scam-tracker) to help other consumers avoid being scammed.

The holidays bring out a lot of cheer and goodwill, but they also bring out scams and schemes that tend to separate you from your hard-earned money. Take the time to check out anything that sounds too good to be true.

For more trustworthy tips, go to BBB.org and report scams at BBB.org/ScamTracker.

Kelvin Collins is president & CEO of the Better Business Bureau serving the Fall Line Corridor, serving 77 counties in East Alabama, West Georgia, Southwest Georgia, Central Georgia, East Georgia, and Western South Carolina. This tips column is provided through the local BBB and the International Association of Better Business Bureaus (IABBB). The Better Business Bureau sets standards for ethical business behavior, monitors compliance and helps consumers identify trustworthy businesses. Questions or complaints about a specific company or charity should be referred directly to the BBB at Phone: 1-800-763-4222, Web site: BBB.org or E-mail: info@centralgeorgia.bbb.org.