

Shopping on the Web

There are huge bargains to be found on the Web – but there are cowboys out there and I don't mean John Wayne. Having said that, you will save a lot of money if you take simple precautions and use your common sense. If something sounds too good to be true then your hearing and/or your mind may be failing if you go much further.

First of all you need to search for the item you wish to buy so a browse through the Shopping category of one of the large Directories will help. If you want an electrical appliance then the web sites of the High Street retailers – Currys, Comet, Dixons – will help. There are no cash tills on the Net and in most cases you will have to pay by credit or debit card which is when many newcomers to the Internet balk at the idea of sending their card details across the ether.

Credit and Debit Cards:

There have been many scare stories regarding the use of credit cards over the Net most of which are simply myths. The picture of balaclava-hooded Balkan Mafiosi intercepting your purchase of a new book from Waterstone's web site is a figment of a tabloid journalist's imagination. You are far more likely to have your credit card details stolen from a high street shop's tally roll or the theatre agency from whom you bought tickets over the telephone.

Forging the details of your debit card requires sophisticated knowledge and equipment as well as a criminal tendency. This is not to say that it does not happen, of course it does, but it is very unlikely. There are car thieves who have developed instruments to steal the coded signal sent from your ignition key when you press the bleeper to unlock your car. They follow you home, relay the signal and drive off with your vehicle while you sleep. These people are out there but most of them are generated by the Hollywood film industry.

It is a sad reflection on our times that we are more likely to lose our cards in a purse or wallet as a result of being mugged in the street than have the details stolen on the Internet. What I am trying to say is that using your card on the Web is as safe as using it anywhere else – or as risky.

Why is Internet shopping cheaper?:

Go into any home furnishing store and you will see hundreds of items of furniture all of which have had to be delivered to the store, demonstrated by the staff, soiled by the customers who have been 'trying them out' and eventually delivered to your door. Staff and premises incur large costs in wages, rent, rates, insurance, paternity leave and insurance. These expensive stores are scattered across the country incurring costs.

A commercial web enterprise can be located in Piddletrenthide where a huge warehouse can service most of the country using carriers. The computers analyse and sort the orders reducing staff numbers allowing the company to buy in bulk and store centrally. The saving in costs can be passed on to the Web customers who are generally delighted to get something £50 cheaper than on the high street. These companies even advertise the fact that you will get a discount if you buy on the Web.

The disadvantage is that you cannot get your hands on the merchandise before you buy but this does not prevent you from checking the goods in a shop and then ordering it for less on the Net.

Having said this, please do not be led to believe that everything is cheaper on the Web. You may see an item in one of the many catalogues that drop through the letterbox with annoying regularity offered at a “sale” price. If you try to order it on the Web you will often find that it is only offered at the original price and only by ordering by mail order will you get the discounted price.

Another factor to bear in mind is that, should anything go wrong, it is far easier to deal with a local shop than a warehouse 300 miles away. Return postage of a heavy item will soon wipe out any savings you may have made on the initial purchase. Buy a fridge/freezer from a local store and they may dispose of your old one but the Web carrier will not, and you will be left with the cost of its disposal.

Security Issues:

Common sense will tell you that large national companies are likely to be more secure in their transactions than a company called Cheap Cigarettes that does not give an address or telephone number on their website.

If you are visiting an unknown site keep a careful eye on any small print and explore the site fully before forming an opinion of the company.

NEVER give out your banking details unless you are absolutely certain who you are dealing with. There have been many instances over the past few years of emails purporting to come from your High Street bank asking for you to confirm your account details. Banks do not do this so avoid these messages like MRSA.

The mechanics of Web shopping:

Almost all shopping sites use the same structure in that you find the item you wish to buy, place it in your virtual shopping basket, proceed to the virtual check-out, submit your name, address and card details and finally confirm your order.

For example, let us say that a friend has shown you some stainless steel food storage bowls that you would like to have for yourself. She tells you that she bought them from the Lakeland Company in Windermere, Cumbria. How do you go about it?

1. Go to a search engine such as Google and search for the words **Lakeland windermere storage** and you will find the web site at www.lakelandlimited.com.
2. Clicking on this link will take you to the Home Page of Lakeland.

- Here we have a number of alternatives – you can click on Kitchenware or enter the word “storage” in the Keyword search box or, if you know it, enter the product code.



- You will eventually navigate your way to the product.
- Click on the product to get a more detailed description.

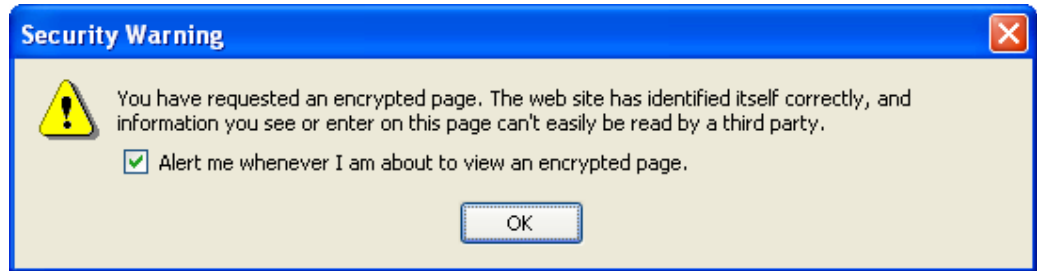


3 Our Registered Office: Lakeland Limited, Alexandra Buildings, Windermere, Cumbria LA23 1BQ
 Telephone: 015394 88100 Facsimile: 015394 88300
 Lakeland Limited is a VAT registered company in the UK Number: 153541873, Company Registration Number: 809688.



- Click on the Shopping Basket icon

7. In the shopping basket display you will be offered more information - **Box 1** - Postage will often add a significant cost to a small purchase.
Box 2 – Information about delivery and returns.
Box 3 - Most important of all – there is an address and contact telephone number should anything go wrong.
8. Click on Purchase. This is where your heart rate begins to rise. What have I committed myself to? Calm down, they don't even know your name or address yet, never mind your credit cards details. Your life is not in their hands so go on, live dangerously and click on Purchase. Immediately a warning window appears explaining that your security is important to the company.



9. Now we come to the point when you will have to give details about yourself. Shopping sites vary in the format they use to receive this information. Some will ask you to **Login, Register** or **Join** when you will be asked for your name, address, telephone number, a user name and password. Others choose to ask you to fill in an order form similar to the familiar mail order format.

your account [< previous](#)

your details

initials

your address

title

last name*

house name (house name or company)
(insert house name if you have no number or street)

house no. and street*

village

town* (city)

county (state, province)

post code** (zip code)

country (including area code)

telephone*

email*

If you wish to receive our email newsletter, please tick this box.
Please click here for our privacy policy.

I would prefer to receive emails in html rather than plain text

login info

username* ?

password* ?

Verify → verify password* ?

Reminder → reminder ?

*required information **required only for UK addresses

For a brief explanation of the above fields please move your mouse pointer over the question mark to the right of each field.

By logging in or joining the company can retain your details so that future orders can be processed without the need to fill in the details all over again. Your details are protected by the user name and password you choose so make a note of them for future use. The principle of choosing these words is the same we used when choosing the user name and password for the email account. The user name can be very simple like your initials and name (without spaces) but the password must be something that is memorable to you but unlikely to be guessed by outsiders – the name of your favourite dog spelt backwards for instance – but not so obscure that you are going to forget it in a few weeks time.

username*

password*

verify password*

reminder

*required information **required only for UK addresses

Password is a secret word chosen by you to verify your login. It should be a word you can remember easily, and be at least 5 characters long.

Explanation of password

submit

Password characteristics will vary from company to company, in this case by pointing at the question mark beside the password box brings up the information that the password must be at least 5 characters long. Most Login forms ask you to verify the password in case you have made a typing error and many will offer a reminder facility. If you forget your password you can contact the company and ask to be reminded of your password. They will not release the password for security reasons but they will give you the reminder that will jog your memory.

10. Click on Submit and the company's computer will check that all is in order. If you have forgotten to complete one or more of the "required information" boxes you will be returned to the Login page with the reason why it has not been accepted. Correct the error and Submit the form again.

With me so far? Well done!

11. Now we come to the credit card bit. If you have decided to go ahead with your purchase, fill in your card details. Remember – none of this information will leave your computer until you give the command but it is wise to consider, at this stage, whether you really want to buy. The reason for this is that, while most sites will display the full details of your purchase before asking you to confirm the order, others may transmit it without further confirmation.
12. That's it! You have completed your first purchase on the Net. Within a very short time you should get an email confirming your order with a reference number for any queries you may have. If you act very quickly you could cancel the order by phone quoting the order number. I say quickly because some commercial sites are astonishingly fast – one company I order my printer inks from will receive the order at 4.00pm and it will be delivered to my home by 10.00am the next day.

This exercise gives you the basic structure of a shopping site that can be applied to most Net outlets. I suggest that you visit a number of these sites and practice your searching for

various goods, checking their description and putting them in your shopping basket – without the final stage of entering your financial details - to build up your confidence in navigating these websites before taking the final step and actually ordering something you really cannot live without.

The Net is not necessarily cheaper:

Beware of falling into the trap that the Internet is always cheaper than the High Street or mail order. Shops and mail order companies will often offer sale goods that are not advertised at the reduced prices on their websites. You may be able to buy a shop display item at a considerable discount while there is no opportunity for a good old-fashioned haggle on the Internet.

Some useful shopping sites:

For books, music and videos –

- www.amazon.co.uk
- www.waterstones.co.uk

For second hand books –

- www.abebooks.co.uk
- www.alibris.com

For electrical goods –

- www.currys.co.uk
- www.dixons.co.uk
- www.bennettsonline.co.uk
- www.comet.co.uk
-

For theatre tickets –

- www.ticketmaster.co.uk

For presents and parties –

- www.hawkin.co.uk
- www.bagsoffun.co.uk

For printer consumables –

- www.choicestationery.co.uk
- www.bigink.co.uk
- www.on-linepaper.co.uk

For digital photography –

- www.dpreview.com

For kitchenware –

- www.kitchenware.co.uk
- www.heals.co.uk
- www.cookcraft.com
- www.thecookingshop.com
- www.johnlewis.com
-

For music –

- www.virgin.com
- www.streetsonline.co.uk