PARKSIDE COMPUTERS

As we approach the Christmas season, there are a multitude of things on our minds. From picking the right tree, ensuring you have enough Brussel sprouts for the various family members visiting for Christmas Dinner, and of course, the all-important Christmas shopping.

Just a few years ago, the vast majority of us would do our shopping in the run up to Christmas, some starting as early as October, others even earlier. This would be done by heading to your local town or city, going into every shop on the High Street, and getting all the bits and bobs. Main presents from Argos, little stocking fillers from Home Bargains, food from Tesco and so on (In the interests of being fair, other shops are available for your shopping, these just happen to be representative of my habits).

We'd load everything into the car, then struggle to find a place to keep it all at home so it was out of sight of the recipient. This proved to be a bit of a struggle, so the average shopper started to shop later and later, with some doing their final purchases on Christmas Eve.
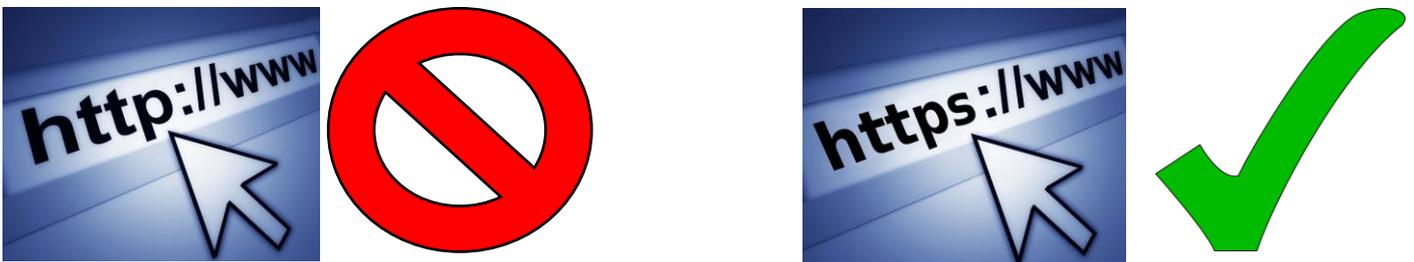

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Nowadays, however, this isn't such a problem. With the huge boom in online retailers such as Amazon, and even food deliveries from your local supermarket, more and more purchases are being made over the internet. You can get next day delivery (so you don't have to store things), you can look around to get the best deal on an item without leaving the warmth of your home, and you can pay for whatever it is by virtually any means going, be it debit or credit card, PayPal, online finance schemes, and in an ever-growing popularity, even currencies such as BitCoin.

Unfortunately, this can cause its own problems. How do you know you're safe? Sure, if you shop with Amazon, you can be pretty certain the product is legitimate, and your money and details are secure. However, there are many online retailers out there who will be all too happy to use your card details you've entered to make their own purchases, and some lack the necessary security, so even if the retailer has no ill intentions, your details can end up in the wrong hands.

So, how do you know you're safe? The first rule of thumb is to use retailers that are well known, trusted and have strict selling regulations. Amazon, eBay, Converse… Whatever it may be, you can usually get it from a well-known source.

You may do a bit more browsing, and find that Xbox game £3 cheaper on a different website, but unless it's a known reputable firm, is it worth the risk? That saved £3 may cost you your life savings!

The other thing to check if shopping online is the retailer's web address. You may notice on your browser that web addresses tend to start with http:// or https:// (Hyper-Text Transfer Protocol). If you get to the stage where you need to pay for an item and the web address still says http://, it is possible that your details can be intercepted by malicious people, and used without your will. If it says https:// (the 's' stands for 'secure'), you have a much, much smaller chance of this happening, and can be fairly sure you're safe.

Finally, decide how you're going to pay. Most banks have great online safety features now, but if paying by debit card, you can still leave yourself open to unauthorised transactions. Parkside Computers recommends paying by Credit Card (where you have better buyer protection), or, if offered, PayPal.

It always helps to have an internet security package on your computer too, as this can help prevent people gaining access to your computer and stealing details this way.

So, to summarise:

1 – Buy from reputable and well known online retailers

2 – If something is too good to be true (price or otherwise), it probably is

3 – Always check the payment page. Is it http or https?

4 – Where available, try to pay by Credit Card or PayPal

5 – Invest in some fantastic Internet Security Software – Parkside Computers can help you out here.

From the team here at Parkside Computers, have a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, and know we're here for you should you have any questions.

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