



## National Consumer League



The National Consumers League developed these tips with the support of MasterCard International.

### **Guard your personal information**

- Don't provide information that you're uncomfortable giving.
- NEVER give anyone the password that you use to log on to your online account or Internet Service Provider.
- Don't provide financial account information unless you are paying for a purchase using that account.

### **Check the seller's reputation**

- Learn as much as you can about companies or individuals BEFORE you do business with them.
- Check with the Better Business Bureau and your state and local consumer agencies to find out about complaints.
- See if the Web site has a feedback forum where people can put information about their transactions.
- Ask your friends about their favorite online merchants.
- Bear in mind that just because a seller has no complaints or a good reputation, it doesn't guarantee that things will go smoothly for you.

### **Consider taxes and shipping costs**

- There may be taxes or duties on your purchase, especially if the transaction is international
- Factor in shipping and handling charges as well to determine the total cost
- You may also have to pay for shipping if you want to return the item.

### **Ask about insurance**

- Will the seller pay to insure the shipment, or is it your expense?
- How much does it cost?
- Is other insurance available to protect you if you don't get what you paid for or if you are dissatisfied?
- Some auction sites provide insurance to buyers. Be sure you know how insurance programs work and how much they cover.

### **Pay the safest way**

- Credit cards are generally the best way to pay because you have legal rights to dispute the charges if the product or service is misrepresented or never delivered.
- You also have limited liability if your card number is stolen or misused. You don't necessarily have the same protection when you are billed through other third parties, such as your telephone company. And your legal dispute rights are not the same when you pay with a debit card as with a credit card, though most debit card issuers voluntarily offer similar protection. If you pay by check or money order, by the time you realize there is a problem your money will probably be gone.

### **Use an escrow service**

- When dealing with individuals or companies that can't accept payment by credit card, escrow services can provide protection. They hold your money until you have confirmed that you received the product or service and then release the payment to the seller. There is a small fee, but the peace of mind is worth it.

### **Keep records**

- Print out all the information on your transaction, including the product description, delivery information, privacy policy, warranties, and any confirmation notices that the seller sends you.