

Public urged to protect themselves from online sales scams

The public must be vigilant in protecting themselves from the threat of online scammers during the Boxing Day sales, the Government has urged today (26 December) after a year which saw a record number of cyber attacks and online scams.

Reports to Action Fraud, the national reporting centre for fraud and cyber crime, reveal that almost 100,000 people in the UK have fallen victim to online shopping fraud in the past 13 months – with over £60 million being reported lost, leading to this call to action for the public to take five simple steps to protect themselves and their families from fraudsters.

Traditionally, Boxing Day marks one of the busiest days on the high street for retailers, however in recent years more people have been shopping online – with Barclaycard estimating £2.7 billion was spent online by UK shoppers on Boxing Day 2020, an average of £162 per shopper.

The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) is encouraging people to shop online securely by following five actionable steps:

1. Keeping accounts secure – strong and separate passwords should be used for the most important online accounts, including email, banking or payment accounts (such as PayPal). The NCSC recommends using three random words to create a password. Turning on two-step verification can add an extra layer of protection.
2. Be aware of emails, text messages or websites that look too good to be true or suspicious – many scammers set up fake messages designed to steal financial and personal information. Members of the public can report suspicious messages to the NCSC via text to 7726 and email to report@phishing.gov.uk.
3. Choose online retailers carefully – research stores before buying to confirm they are legitimate through trustworthy consumer websites. Some emails or texts about amazing offers may contain links to fake websites. If unsure, don't use the link.
4. Use a credit card for online payments if possible – most major credit card providers protect online purchases, and are obliged to refund individuals in certain circumstances.
5. Only provide enough details to complete a purchase – only fill in the mandatory details on a website when shopping online (often marked with an asterisk).

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for Cyber Crime Steve Barclay said:

With a record number of cyber attacks this year, it is crucial we all take some steps to keep ourselves and our families safe from

scammers while shopping online, particularly in the Boxing Day sales which have become a firm favourite for fraudsters.

In the past year, government and police action has seen numerous convictions on cyber fraud, and we should all play our part to stamp out this terrible crime that can ruin lives.

Paul Maddinson, Director of National Resilience and Strategy at the NCSC said:

Scammers will use any opportunity to try and trick the public and businesses into parting with their money so it's really important that we all know how to protect ourselves.

Whilst scams can be convincing, there are practical steps you can take to avoid falling victim to cyber crime which can all be found on the NCSC's website.

This warning against online scams comes alongside growing concern about the vulnerability of people's personal technology. Hackers are targeting individuals' applications and email accounts, gaining access to personal and financial information and exposing individuals to considerable risk.

As people receive new laptops and smartphones over Christmas, the risks are magnified. The government is also encouraging individuals to ensure that any new devices are protected to keep personal and financial information secure from hackers. However, these dangers are easily avoidable by adopting two key Cyber Aware behaviours:

- Turning on two-step verification
- Using three random words to secure your email accounts

For further guidance on how to stay secure online, visit www.cyberaware.gov.uk