Online shopping scam

Fake websites are one of the largest types of online scams. But what do they do? Scammers set up fake retailer websites that look like genuine online retail stores. They may use sophisticated designs and layouts, possibly stolen logos, and a '.com' of a major country domain.

This is what you should look for:

There should be a padlock symbol in the browser window where you can see the site address / URL when you log in or register (beware these on unfamiliar sites as this can be faked). If you are not sure the webpage is genuine, do not use it. Be sure that the padlock is within the address bar at the top of the screen, not on the page itself.

The web address should begin with 'https://' (the 's' stands for 'secure'). If it starts with 'http//' then the site is not secure and must not be trusted with your personal information.

They insist on immediate payment, or payment by electronic funds transfer, or a wire service.

Product is advertised at an unbelievably low price, or advertised as having amazing benefits, or features that sound too good to be true.

The store may have limited information about delivery and other policies. A scam retailer is likely not to provide adequate information about privacy, terms and conditions of use, dispute resolution or contact details.

They may also insist that you pay up-front for vouchers before you can access a cheap deal or a give-away.

Ads are a fact of life. No matter where you go, you are going to run into ads. But if you are on a website that is more ads than content, tread carefully. If you must click several links to get through intrusive pop-ups that redirect you to reach the intended page, then you are on a website that is probably fake or at least scamming. There is a fine line between user experience and selling ads. When a website has no regard for that line, you need to be wary.

You may be pressurised to transfer payment or a holding deposit before you have seen the item(s) in person.

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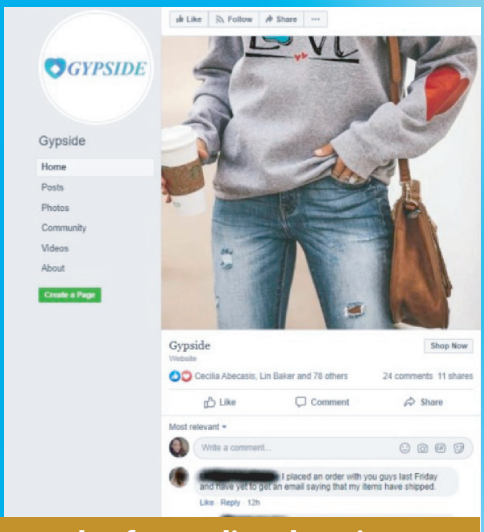
Action to take:

Check if the website or social media page has a refund or returns policy, and that their policies sound fair. The better online shopping and auction sites have detailed complaint or dispute handling processes in case something goes wrong.



This is an example of an on-line shopping scam

"Contact Us" section: How much information is there? Is an address supplied? Is there a phone number?Does that line connect to the company? The more information that is supplied, the more confident you should feel – provided it is actually good information. If all they are giving you is an email address or, worse, there is no contact information whatsoever, abort. And remember to verify the information. Google the address, maybe even check out street view. See if any

Never accept a cheque or money order for payment that is more than what you agreed upon or to forward money on for anyone.

If payment is requested by virtual currencies such as Bitcoin, then abort.

When making online payments, only pay for items using a secure payment service. Look for a URL starting with 'https' and a closed padlock symbol, or a payment provider such as PayPal.

Avoid purchasing online with an e-shop that asks you to make the payment to a random PayPal address, or wire it by Western Union, or pay in iTunes gift cards.

Think twice and check the site and the domain well before you respond to provide your financial details to proceed to centre parts of the on-line store.

Check for a digital footprint. On the Internet nothing exists in a vacuum. Chances are other people have had experiences with this company and – good or bad – they have shared those experiences somewhere. With just a tiny bit of digging you can probably figure out if a website is fake, based on reviews alone. Google the name of the site along with "+ reviews". Also look for online reviews on sites such as Trustpilot, Feefo or Sitejabber which aggregate customer reviews before you take any action.

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