



## **Warning against festive fraudsters during the Christmas rush**

Consumers in Powys are being warned by the county council about possible scams during the lead-up to the Christmas holidays.

According to Get Safe Online, figures showed that last year victims reported losing nearly to £16 million to Christmas shopping fraudsters – increasing from £10 million lost the year before.

Action Fraud reports rose by 25% when comparing the 2016 Christmas period with the same period in 2015, Get Safe Online confirmed. While an analysis of last year's crimes showed that 65% of crimes at Christmas were linked to online action sites, with the average loss for these reports coming in at £727.

Now Powys County Council's Trading Standards Service want people to protect themselves from scams and have some top tips on how to spot a scam:

### **Payment**

Don't pay for anything by transferring money directly to people or companies you don't know, however desperate you are to buy. If it's a fraud, it's unlikely the bank will recover or refund your money. The safest way to pay for anything online is by credit card.

### **Fake online shops**

As the Christmas retail rush ramps up, fake online stores pop up to target on our desire for a bargain. Sometimes, these sites will be poorly designed, but the scammers are betting that, in the festive rush, enough people will be too distracted to be able to tell the difference between these sites and legitimate "pop-up" shops.

Make sure the shopping website you're on is authentic and the payment page secure. You can do this by checking that the address starts with 'https' ('s' is for secure) and there's a closed padlock in the address bar, but first, make sure that the web address has been entered correctly as some fake sites change one or two letters in the hope you won't notice. Look for online reviews of the site and think about phoning the contact number. If there isn't one, this could be a warning sign.

### **Charity phishing**

Scammers know that many people feel charitable at this time of year and so target your good will. They may send emails from a bogus charity or ones that purport to come from a legitimate charity but contain a link to a scam site. Tip: If you want to give to good causes at Christmas, go through the charity in question's own site.

### **Fake delivery emails/texts**

Watch out for emails or texts from parcel delivery firms telling you to open an attachment for your delivery note. A real delivery firm wouldn't send you that. Also, unexpected emails, texts or posts urging you to click on a link for any reason should be treated with caution.

### **E-voucher scams**

These are often shared on social media or email and claim to offer free vouchers from well-known brands. Potential victims are told that, to claim a voucher, all they need to do is click on a link. This can take them to a fake site where they will be asked for their details. Tip: Look out for poor grammar and, if in any doubt, check the voucher by emailing the shop.

## **Social media scams**

Scammers use social media to tempt people with irresistibly good deals on goods such as electronics and jewellery. The social networks are also a place where links to phishing sites and malware can be widely shared. Scammers may even be "friends" of real friends of yours who say yes to every connection request. Tip: The best defence here is not to click on links that look even remotely suspicious.

## **Text messages**

More recently and becoming more popular are text messages scams. These messages can vary, sometimes they will pretend to be someone you know. They can get lucky and pick a name of a close friend/relative and processed to say that they have been in accident or in financial trouble and need money. If any doubt ring your friend or relative. Avoid giving money through links on text messages or emails.

## **Always log out**

When you've finished your payment, you should log out of your account, as simply closing the page may not in itself end your session.

## **Buying tickets**

Buy concert, event, fixture or entry tickets only from official sources such as the box office, sports club or reputable fan ticket exchange site. Only by doing this will you know that your tickets exist and are not fakes.

Cllr Jonathan Wilkinson, Cabinet Member for Trading Standards, said: "UK consumers spent almost £80 billion at Christmas, according to the Centre of Retail Research. Unfortunately, this means Christmas has come early for fraudsters, who like to make the most of the festive season by coming up with ever more ways to target consumers during the hectic time of the Christmas rush.

"Our advice is to shop savvy this Christmas. If something seems too good to be true, it probably is."

If you do experience any problems or have any pre-shopping enquiries, you can contact the Citizens Advice Consumer Service for advice about your consumer rights and how to resolve disputes. They can be contacted by calling 03454 04 05 06.

**For further information please contact:**

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