



New Year Sales? Massive discounts? Too good to be true?

Northamptonshire Police are asking online shoppers to be aware of criminals on the web looking to scam the unsuspecting.

The Force is chiming with the warning bells being rung by the National Fraud Authority and the UK's lead Force for fraud, the City of London Police, who are highlighting the growing threat of online fraudsters.

With more than half the UK adult population now shopping online, police analysts are advising that this frenetic activity also raises the risk of buyers losing money to criminals.

Shoppers should be aware that behind some flashy websites, canny criminals are looking to cash-in on the New Year online spree.

Anonymous fraudsters can set up legitimate-looking websites to sell either counterfeit goods or no goods at all.

There has been a 15 per cent increase in reports of online shopping and auction fraud since July.

The following products are the top five to feature in online shopping and auction fraud:

1. Smart Phones
2. Digital Cameras
3. Designer goods including jewellery and branded boots
4. Laptops and notebooks
5. Video game systems.

Financial Fraud Action UK and CIFAS - The UK's Fraud Prevention Service - are supporting the call for consumers to take basic steps online to protect themselves this year.

To make sure your online shopping is safe and secure remember these top tips:

- * Use secure websites that you trust.
- * Do your research before making a purchase.
- * Check online forums for feedback
- * Do they have a real-world presence?
- * Can you see their address and phone number?
- * Is it a valid UK registered phone number?
- * Check the browser address changes from 'http' to 'https' to indicate you have a secure connection and look for a padlock or an unbroken key symbol on your web browser
- * If website prices for designer items, games and smart phones seem too good to be true, they probably are.
- * Legitimate popular technology and designer items are rarely discounted.

For further advice and to report fraud, log onto www.actionfraud.org.uk or call 0300 123 2040, Textphone 0300 123 2050 or visit www.getsafeonline.org.uk for other tips on staying safe online.

Dr Bernard Herdan, the chief executive officer of the National Fraud Authority, said: "All that glitters is not always gold and, particularly at this time of year, too many people fall foul of fraudsters while rushing to buy 'bargains' online.

"Like more than half of us now, I'm a huge fan of online shopping, but I always make sure I protect myself. The good news is it is really simple to stay safe online so please follow these easy tips.

"If you are unfortunate enough to get caught out by a fraudster, report it to Action Fraud. The experts there will take your report, provide you with comprehensive fraud prevention advice and send the intelligence to the police's National Fraud Intelligence Bureau, so helping to identify, track and stop these criminals".

SOUNDS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE??? ~ THEN IT PROBABLY IS!!!