

Holiday Shopping Tips

By Randy Alderman

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The upcoming holiday shopping season is sure to be busy. Unfortunately, the vast majority of consumer financial fraud occurs around November and December, according to Randy Alderman, security officer at Bradford National Bank.

In an effort to better assist shoppers, Bradford National Bank has compiled a list of holiday shopping tips to help keep consumers safe from possible fraud.

“Obviously, we encourage everyone to shop local whenever possible,” Alderman said. “However, we understand that we live in a digital age and a lot of consumers will skip the busy parking lots and opt to shop online.” He added, “Online shopping can be a dangerous place unless you take several precautions before placing those big orders.”

- Make sure your cell phone number and email address are current with your bank and credit card companies. “Banks and credit card companies are now monitoring fraud in real-time, and it’s possible they will call to verify a transaction,” Alderman said.
- Enable Security Alerts for all your financial transactions. “At Bradford National Bank, download the Shazam Bolt\$ app and register your debit card,” Alderman said. “It will allow you to track you accounts and set spending parameters.”
- Consider using your mobile wallet. Alderman said, “Bradford National Bank supports Apple Pay, Samsung Pay, and Google Pay. By using this service, it helps protect your debit or credit card.”
- Don’t fall for fake shopping deals via email.
- There are thousands of fake websites. It is better to just type in the address you are looking for or use bookmarks.
- Be wary of online discount coupons or any “unknown” offer that encourages you to click on a link or download an app for promised savings.
- Don’t shop using public WiFi. Hackers can exploit this and steal your account information.
- Always make sure you use unique passwords for every site you use and make sure your virus protection is up to date.

If you do shop online, it is best to have a plan for when packages are delivered. Stealing packages from porches is a big business.

- Be wary of Text or Email alerts that claim a package has been shipped, but asks for personal information or asks you to click on a link to verify delivery.
- Also be wary of emails from FedEx, USPS, UPS, Walmart, Amazon, etc, that encourage you to click on a link or verify your contact/payment information.
- If possible, have the packages delivered to your place of employment.
- Come home for lunch or have a trusted person gather the packages if you know when they will be delivered.

If you do venture out to the shopping districts, consumers are not immune from fraud.

- Use your mobile wallet instead of the physical card.
- Be on the lookout for skimming devices that steal card data.
- When possible, pay with cash. But, be alert of your surroundings when using an ATM.

- When you shop in person, take the absolute minimum in your purse or wallet. If you won't need it, leave it home.
- Don't be distracted or leave belongings unattended.

During the holidays, it's important that you track and inventory your financial information more often.

- Check your online banking every single day.
- Carefully review each and every one of your credit card statements. Do this online if possible.
- If you see something you are not sure about, contact your financial institution or credit card company ASAP. Don't wait.
- Inventory your purse or wallet each week.

"Fraud happens. It's now a fact of life, regardless of where you live. However, if you take a few simple precautions ahead of time and think before clicking that link, you can alleviate a lot of financial holiday headaches," Alderman said. "If you suspect fraud at any time, contact your financial institution or credit card company immediately. Quick action on your part could help stop fraud in its track."