

Online purchase scams up – BBB warns holiday shopping is at risk

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Online purchase scams now account for more than a third of all scam reports filed with the Better Business Bureau (BBB), and four out of five consumers who report such scams lose money, making it the #1 riskiest scam type.

BBB is warning consumers ahead of the holiday shopping season to be aware of how scammers deceive consumers, whether they are actively shopping or passively browsing.

The 2021 BBB Online Purchase Scams Report examines more than 55,000 online purchase scam reports submitted to BBB Scam Tracker between 2015 and 2021; as well as new survey research conducted in 2021 to get insights from those who reported online purchase scams in 2020 and 2021.

Online purchase scams consistently rank among the top three riskiest since 2017, and a significant number of people continue to lose money when targeted by online purchase scams (74.8% in 2021). The median dollar loss for this scam type has risen in recent years, up from \$76 in 2019 to \$102 so far in 2021.

Experts are predicting an

earlier start to the 2021 holiday shopping season because of supply chain concerns, microchip shortages, and holiday hiring. BBB warns scammers will find ways to take advantage of the situation by varying the product categories, capitalizing on what peo-

ple are looking for online and focusing on the most sought-after gifts such as electronics, toys, and other trendy gift items.

Each year, the BBB Institute issues a BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report, which analyzes the previous





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year's data. Since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, online purchase scams have jumped along with an increase in online shopping. BBB took a deeper dive into the data by surveying people who had reported scams to ask them more about their situation.

Whether a consumer was actively shopping for a product or passively browsing, it appears this activity had an impact on susceptibility. Sixty-four percent of survey respondents were actively searching for a product when they lost money to an online purchase scam. Thirty-six percent of those who lost money were passively looking or not searching.

When it came time to placing an order and expecting the item to be shipped, 32% surveyed reported receiving shipment tracking information that seemed authentic, 30% received fake shipping information, 2% received shipping information they didn't verify, and 36% didn't receive shipping information. Several survey respondents noted that they didn't suspect a scam at first because they expected shipping delays due to the pandemic.

The analysis of online purchase scam reports submitted to BBB Scam Tracker found that more than 400 different types of products were used by scammers to perpetrate scams. Pets and pet supplies were the riskiest sales category in 2020. Almost 35% of online purchase scam reports were pet-related, with 70% of people losing money, and a median dollar loss of \$750. The French Bulldog was the top breed used to perpetuate puppy scams.

For tips on how to avoid online shopping scams, visit

BBB.org/OnlinePurchaseScams. To report a scam, go to BBB.org/Scam Tracker.

To learn more about other risky scams, go to BBB.org/ScamTips.

Kelvin Collins is president & CEO of the Better Business Bureau serving the Fall Line Corridor, serving 77 counties in East Alabama, West Georgia, Southwest Georgia, Central Georgia, East Georgia and Western South Carolina. This tips column is provided through the local

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