



Fair Trading Commission

Stay Safe While Preparing for Back-to-School: FTC's Tips for Safe Shopping

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As the new school year approaches, the Fair Trading Commission (FTC) urges you to shop wisely and stay vigilant against deceptive commerce activities targeting back-to-school shoppers. To help you stay informed, we've outlined common activities to look out for and provided tips to protect yourself. Let's work together to ensure your back-to-school shopping experience is secure and as stress-free as possible!

Bait and Switch

"Bait and Switch" refers to a deceptive practice where businesses advertise an attractively priced product but substitute it with a lower-quality or more expensive item. This tactic is particularly common with electronics such as laptops and tablets for students. Be wary of businesses that engage in this behaviour and report any such incidents to the Fair Trading Commission

Front-Loading of Financial Aid

As parents and students apply for grants, scholarships, and other financial assistance, FTC reminds consumers to carefully review the terms and conditions of these agreements. Front-loading is a form of bait and switch where schools offer an attractive financial aid package to incoming students, only to reduce the grant amount in subsequent years, resulting in significantly higher out-of-pocket expenses when they change grade levels. Always read the fine print and ensure you know all the information when accepting financial aid.

Misleading Advertising of School-Related Services

Some businesses offering school-related services, such as transportation, may engage in misleading advertising by charging more than their advertised prices. For example, a school bus service may promote a specific rate but change the price when finalizing the contract. The FTC advises against engaging with entities that practice such behaviour and encourages you to report these actions to the Commission.

False Discounts

When shopping, be cautious of merchants that advertise false discounts. Some businesses may claim to offer discounted prices while actually selling products at their originally listed price or increasing the originally listed price to make the discount appear larger. The FTC recommends that you stay focused; make purchasing decisions based on final sale prices rather than purported discounts.

Online Shopping Safety

Before making online purchases, check reviews and verify the legitimacy of the stores. While e-commerce offers convenience, it also comes with risks. Do your research and ask questions before making your purchase. When using websites, check for encryption by looking for the padlock in the address bar. Checking legitimacy becomes more difficult when engaging in social commerce but it is not impossible. Beware of stores with poor follower engagement or those which are able to only provide stock images rather than real-life images of the product. Finally, use secure payment methods instead of cash to limit your exposure to fraudulent transactions.

Ensure that what you order is exactly what you receive and report any discrepancies to the Fair Trading Commission.

Trust Your Instincts and Report Suspicious Activity

Be aware, shop safely, and report any suspicious activity to the FTC. If a deal seems too good to be true, trust your instincts, investigate further, or avoid doing business with that merchant. Preparing for school is challenging enough—let’s work together to make this back-to-school season safe and stress-free. Best of luck to all students!