



## **ECC Dublin Consumer Monthly**

**June 2006**

Yesterday, the European Consumer Centre Network published its third Annual Report on the Reality of the European Online Marketplace. Unfortunately the problems identified in both 2003 and 2004 continued to trouble online shoppers in 2005. We take a closer look at the Report's findings here.

The query for June comes from a consumer who asks if an airline is required to refund airport taxes on a ticket that was unused.

Mary Denise O'Reilly  
Editor

- 1. What's bothering you? – The reality of shopping on the European online marketplace**
- 2. Consumer query of the month – Can I get a refund of airport taxes on a flight ticket I didn't take?**

[www.eccdublin.ie](http://www.eccdublin.ie) : European consumer rights online

### **1. What's bothering you? – The reality of shopping on the European online marketplace**

Internet shopping is a reality for European shoppers and its popularity is on the rise. Between 2003 and 2005 the number of Irish people shopping online increased from 76,000 to 318,000. It may only represent 14% of Irish people who have access to the internet but with greater broadband connectivity more consumers will opt to buy online. Like shopping on the high street, shopping online comes with its own unique problems and ECC-Net attempts to highlight these in its Annual European Online Marketplace Report.

Yesterday, ECC-Net published its third consecutive report looking at the shopping online complaints reported to its centres in 2005. The findings confirm that consumers are still facing many difficulties when it comes to internet shopping. In fact the overall number of complaints recorded in 2005 grew by 74% from the previous year. ECC Dublin recorded almost four times more complaints in 2005 as in 2004.

As regards the type of problem reported, the trends observed in 2005 were similar to previous years. The main problem related to the non-delivery of goods. One in three goods simply failed to arrive. 25% of all online shopping complaints reported to ECC-Net related to goods which arrived but were faulty.

There has been a noticeable increase in the different types of fraud reported, with fraudsters becoming more and more inventive in their methods used. Such frauds

vary from 'phishing' to fake websites to frauds committed through internet auction websites.

One example of online fraud reported to ECC Dublin in 2005 was from a consumer in Ireland who purchased two laptops from a UK website. He paid for them in advance by Western Union but the goods never arrived. Fraudsters had stolen the name of a legitimate company based in the UK, which did not even sell laptops, and used the company's postal address. As the money had been sent by money transfer it was impossible to trace where it went. ECC Dublin could not secure a refund for the consumer's and had to refer the complaint to the police as it was a criminal matter.

ECC-Net doesn't want to dissuade consumers from shopping online but to inform them of the big problem areas. In fact the Report offers general tips on how to shop safely online and how to avoid being scammed.

At the end of 2006 new European legislation will come into force called the Consumer Protection Co-operation Regulation. The Regulation will provide for greater co-operation among national enforcers to take coordinated action against rogue traders. It is a move in the right direction for consumers. But regulation on its own will not instill confidence in consumers. What is required is better enforcement of existing legislation and for web traders to do the simple things right i.e. deliver the goods on time and without defects.

To read the Report in full click here;

[http://www.eccdublin.ie/publications/ecc\\_reports.html](http://www.eccdublin.ie/publications/ecc_reports.html)

## **2. Consumer question of the month – I purchased a ticket for a flight which I didn't take. Is the airline required to refund me the airport taxes?**

Airport taxes are charged per passenger flying. If the ticket is not used, there is no passenger flying and therefore, the tax is not due (airlines are not entitled to charge for an undue tax). However, airlines usually do not routinely refund taxes but only do so, on request. To make matters worse, there is no specific law under which they are required to refund these charges. Nor is there any law that prevents them from charging an administration charge for processing the refund. We have seen cases where the administration charge equals exactly the amount of tax being refunded. Regardless, our advice to you is to contact the airline in question and request a refund.

If you wish to email your consumer queries to us please do so to [info@eccdublin.ie](mailto:info@eccdublin.ie)

The European Consumer Centre is funded by the European Commission and the Office of the Director of Consumer Affairs.

*Disclaimer: Whilst every effort is made to ensure accuracy, the European Consumer Centre cannot be held responsible for matters arising from any errors or omissions contained in this publication. The information provided is intended as a guide only and not as a legal interpretation.*