



European Consumer News

November 2007

Shopping online can be fantastic, offering you great choice and very often, great value. However, the Irish European Consumer Centre frequently hears from consumers who have had bad experiences with fraudulent websites, and care *is* needed. If you know nothing about particular website, how do you know if you can trust it or not? The European Consumer Centre network has responded to this 'knowledge gap' with Howard, our new Online Shopping Assistant. For details on how it works, see below.

Our consumer query this month comes from a person who is worried about buying toys this Christmas in light of recent product recalls.

If you have had a problem with a purchase from another EU country, please contact us on 01 8090600 or at info@eccdublin.ie. For information on your consumer rights in a European context, see www.eccdublin.ie.

Rosaleen Quinlan

Editor

1. What's bothering you?

Where can I find out about my rights when shopping online and how do I know whether a website can be trusted or not?

Howard, our new Online Shopping Assistant provides you with information on your rights when shopping online. Did you know, for example that (while certain exceptions apply) you have 7 days to return goods bought online?

Howard also helps to research a particular website, helping you to decide if that site should be trusted or not.

You simply enter the website name, and Howard finds information about that site for you, including:

- When the website name was registered. If the website has been registered very recently, particular care is needed, especially if prices seem extremely attractive and pre-payment is required.
- The results of a Google search. If the results show negative comments from other consumers, there is good reason to be cautious.
- Companies Registration Office (CRO) information. If you enter the company's name in the CRO search facility, you can see if the company is registered, and what information is held about them.

Howard cannot guarantee that a website is trustworthy or offer a guarantee of service or quality. However, it can help you to avoid difficulties by informing yourself about a website in advance of making a purchase. Howard, the Online Shopping Assistant is available now on the European Consumer Centre website at www.eccdublin.ie.

If you do have an unresolved problem with an online trader based in Europe, perhaps we can help. Contact us on 01 8090600 or at info@eccdublin.ie.

2. Consumer query of the month

I keep hearing about toys being recalled- how do I know if a toy is safe or not?

During 2007, parents have become worried about purchasing toys following several toy recalls from high profile companies. As well as ensuring that the particular toy is suitable for their child's age, parents should always look for the 'CE' mark indicating that toys conform to an agreed standard. Additionally, a system called RAPEX is in place across all member states, which alerts national authorities to any problems found with products which can then be immediately removed from shelves in the state in question.

Consumers can be assured that toy safety is taken very seriously across the European Union. Meglena Kuneva, Commissioner for Consumer Policy has warned that the EU will 'get tough' on toy manufacturers and has instigated a full review of all product safety systems in Europe.

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