

# Explainer: What to watch out for when shopping online post-Brexit

IRELAND



Can consumers avoid extra charges for shopping online after Brexit?

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Can consumers avoid extra charges for shopping online after Brexit?

The UK's departure from the European Union at the start of the year has led to confusion and delivery delays for many online shoppers.

According to the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC), already 165 queries have been made to the Commission since January 1st regarding post-Brexit online shopping.

So what has changed, and how can consumers avoid being stung by an unexpected bill from Revenue?

**Why are Irish shoppers being charged extra for products from the UK?**

Now that the UK has left the EU, they no longer benefit from the single market, meaning goods coming into EU member state countries from the UK (excluding Northern Ireland) now face taxes, similar to imports from other parts of the world.

Goods imported to Ireland from non-EU countries are subject to VAT and other customs charges, depending on the type of goods.

## **To avoid charges on the likes of Amazon.co.uk, can I use another country's site?**

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As Amazon does not have a dedicated Irish site, Irish customers are automatically brought to their UK version (Amazon.co.uk), and therefore orders from this site will be subject to charges if the goods are sent from the UK.

Other EU countries do have their own Amazon sites, such as France (Amazon.fr), Germany (Amazon.de) and the Netherlands (Amazon.nl) and if the goods being sent from retailers on these sites are being sent from the EU, they will not be subject to additional charges.

However, the CCPC points out that just because you may be shopping on the Amazon site of an EU member state does not mean the goods will be sent from that country as the products may be based elsewhere and therefore you should confirm where the items are coming from before purchasing.

In addition to this, a spokesperson from Amazon highlighted that for Irish customers, Prime benefits such as free delivery only applies to their .co.uk website.

Another issue with using an alternate country's website is that much of the information may not be in English, and for those purchasing electronics, the device will likely come with an EU two-pin plug, rather than the three-pin plug used in Ireland and the UK.

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Information on changes to Amazon.co.uk for shoppers in the Republic of Ireland can be found [here](#).

### **If I don't want to shop on websites like Amazon, are there EU/Irish alternatives?**

The ease of the 'one-stop shop' has made Amazon the first port of call for many shoppers, but with the uncertainty of VAT and customs charges, it's now worth shopping around to see if products are available from Irish or EU retailers, allowing you to avoid tariffs and retain your EU consumer rights.

Doing your technology shopping closer to home may be the best option due to the plug differences between Ireland and Europe, but there are still plenty of options. Harvey Norman have assured customers "all online orders are fulfilled by our stores and warehouses located in the Republic of Ireland" with deliveries usually taking between 5-7 days depending on the item. Some retailers are also offering Reserve and Collect services, but under Level 5 restrictions, journeys beyond 5km from your home should only be taken if it is for an essential purpose, so keep that in mind.

For homewares, Irish company Homestore + More cover cooking and baking equipment, bedding, storage, and much more, and offer home delivery to all 32 counties with orders usually delivered within five days according to their website.

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Online beauty retailers have performed well throughout lockdown despite the lack of social occasions, while at-home self-care products have become essential in the absence of salons. Many Irish pharmacies, such as Meaghers and Cara now carry a wide range of beauty, grooming and self-care products, while many Irish beauty salons also have online shopping options.

These are just a few examples of how you may be able to avoid the Brexit hassle by shopping around for Irish and EU retailers first, and if you can support local businesses in the process, it's a win-win.

### **How am I protected when shopping online with an EU-registered retailer?**

When shopping with retailers registered in EU member states, EU consumer law automatically applies.

These laws ensure the consumer receives a minimum two-year guarantee against faulty goods, items that do not look or work as advertised, and items that are not installed correctly, either by the retailer

or the consumer due to shortcomings in the instructions. If you purchase such an item, you are entitled to some form of redress.

EU consumer law means you can receive a replacement item, have the original item repaired, receive a reduction in the price paid for the item, or a reimbursement of the item's cost. Consumers also have the right to 14-day 'cooling-off period', the right to clear information, and the right to a refund for delayed/non-delivery.

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More information on EU consumer rights can be found on the [European Consumer Centre \(ECC\) Ireland](#) website.

## **So, if I shop Irish I won't face any additional charges?**

If the goods are being sent from within the country, or from Northern Ireland then you will not be charged VAT, customs duties or excise duties.

However, the CCPC is warning consumers that just because a website has an Irish domain (ending in .ie) does not mean they are an Irish company, or that their products are being sent to the consumer from within the country.

Many non-Irish companies have registered Irish domains, but no warehouses in the State, while some Irish companies may also store their products in UK warehouses, meaning they have to be imported into Ireland.

Aside from charges, the CCPC adds that if the company is not registered in an EU country, EU consumer protection law may not apply, so shoppers should search for the retailer's registered address in the Terms and Conditions section prior to purchase.

## **How are some businesses avoiding the charges?**

Many companies that have warehouses in Europe are avoiding the charges by shipping Irish orders from their EU bases instead of their warehouses in Britain, for example online-only retailer ASOS.

While these deliveries may take a little longer to reach Ireland, as the goods are coming from another EU country, they are not subject to VAT and customs.

Other businesses have opted to front the costs themselves, such as fashion retailer Boohoo.com.

## **What if I still want to order items from a UK-based company?**

The first thing consumers should be aware of when buying from UK-based companies now is that their EU consumer rights and protections no longer automatically apply according to the CCPC.

Secondly, they should also be aware of the additional charges they will likely face. "If the value of the items (including shipping costs) is €22 or more, VAT may now also be payable. In circumstances where the total value of an online purchase is €150 or more, consumers may also have to pay import charges, such as customs or excise duties on some items from the UK (excluding Northern Ireland).

"Before ordering from outside the EU, consumers are advised to visit the Revenue website to find out more information about what additional charges may apply," the CCPC says.

The Commission also advise consumers to check if you can cancel the order before it is dispatched, if the goods can be returned, how long you have to return them, and who covers the cost of the return.