

THE CHALLENGE

Mike found a popular gaming console on an unfamiliar website for 40% below retail price. Excited by the deal, he purchased it without researching the site. After payment, he received only an automated email. The console never arrived, and when he tried to contact customer service, the website had disappeared. He lost \$300 before his credit card company helped him dispute the charge.

What warning signs did Mike miss, and how could he have protected himself from this scam?

Learning Objectives

- Identify the benefits and risks of online shopping compared to in-store purchases.
- Evaluate website security features to determine if a retailer is trustworthy.
- Apply strategies to protect personal and financial information when shopping online.

CORE CONCEPTS

Term	Definition
HTTPS	Secure website protocol; look for "https://" and a padlock icon in the address bar.
Phishing	Fraudulent attempts to steal information by impersonating legitimate businesses.
Digital Wallet	An electronic service (Apple Pay, PayPal) that adds a security layer to payments.
Encryption	Converting data into code to prevent unauthorized access during transmission.
Two-Factor Authentication	Extra security requiring two forms of verification to access accounts.

Background: Online shopping offers unmatched convenience—comparing prices, reading reviews, and shopping 24/7 from anywhere. But this convenience comes with risks: scam websites, identity theft, and lost packages. The key to safe online shopping is verification: checking that websites are secure (HTTPS), researching unfamiliar retailers, using protected payment methods (credit cards over debit), and **trusting your instincts** when deals seem too good to be true.

APPLY IT

PART A: WEBSITE SECURITY EVALUATION

For each website scenario, determine if it's safe to shop there and explain your reasoning.

Website 1: BargainTech-Deals.net

URL shows "http://" (no padlock). Prices are 60% below retail. No physical address or phone number listed. Only accepts wire transfers or gift cards. Website was registered 2 weeks ago.

Safe to shop? _____ (yes / no / proceed with caution)

Red flags: _____

Website 2: Amazon.com

URL shows "https://" with padlock. Established company with verifiable contact info. Multiple payment options including credit cards. Customer reviews and seller ratings visible. Clear return policy.

Safe to shop? _____ (yes / no / proceed with caution)

Security features: _____

Website 3: Local Boutique Website

URL shows "https://" with padlock. Small business you've never heard of. Has physical address you can verify. Accepts major credit cards. Limited reviews (only 12). Return policy clearly stated.

Safe to shop? _____ (yes / no / proceed with caution)

Recommendation: _____

Hint: Legitimate sites have HTTPS, verifiable contact info, multiple payment options, and realistic prices. Too-good-to-be-true deals are often scams.

PART B: ONLINE VS. IN-STORE COMPARISON

4. List THREE advantages of online shopping and THREE advantages of in-store shopping.

Online:

In-Store:

5. For which type of purchase would you choose online vs. in-store? Explain your reasoning.

PART C: PROTECTION STRATEGIES

6. Create your personal online shopping security checklist (list at least 4 items you'd verify before purchasing).

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Which of the following is a sign that a website may NOT be secure?

- ☐ A. The URL begins with "https://"
- ☐ B. A padlock icon appears in the address bar
- ☐ C. The site only accepts wire transfers or gift cards
- ☐ D. Customer reviews are displayed

2. Why is it generally safer to pay with a credit card rather than a debit card when shopping online?

3. Thomas uses a separate email for online shopping and saves all confirmation emails. Why are these smart practices?

4. What THREE things should Mike (from The Challenge) have done differently before making his purchase?

5. **Reflection:** Describe your approach to online shopping. What steps do you take (or will you start taking) to protect yourself? What would make you decide NOT to complete a purchase?
