



Series 5 – How Do I Access the Internet, Securely?

Welcome back to a series of computer related articles brought to you by VistaSol Computer Solutions. Over the coming weeks we are going to be featuring articles based on the theme of 'How do I . . .?'

This week we're continuing our series of articles on the subject of 'How Do I Access the Internet' by exploring the increasing phenomenon of shopping on-line, and how to keep yourself secure:

Part 1 – How do I Secure My Shopping On – Line?

If you're thinking of doing some last minute shopping on-line for Christmas (probably a bit late now, but this applies at any time for that matter), here's our top ten tips to help keep you secure on-line.

1. Anti Virus
2. Firewall
3. Email address
4. Choose a reputable retailer
5. Look for contact details
6. Check delivery times
7. Check total costs
8. Check the returns policy
9. Look for the padlock icon
10. Pay by credit card / PayPal

Shopping online provides a convenient way of making purchases at any time of day, 365 days a year, from a wide range of retailers offering more choice than ever before. However, it is important to familiarise yourself with a few basic points to ensure that you have an enjoyable time shopping in the global shopping centre that the internet has come to represent.

'Amazon.co.uk' and a number of other companies, e.g. 'play.com', will deliver to Spain for free providing that you spend at least 25 Euros. Bear in mind however, that Amazon also use 3rd party suppliers; these 3rd party suppliers will almost certainly charge a hefty delivery charge to Spain, so make sure any goods you buy are specifically from Amazon, and not a 3rd party supplier. (Look in the left hand column for seller's information, and select just Amazon).

1. Anti Virus

Make sure you have some form of anti virus protection installed, and make sure you keep it up to date. AVG Free is fine; it updates itself on a daily basis and offers some protection while you are on-line. The latest version of AVG is 'AVG 2012'. Most anti-virus software programs will warn you if the site you are visiting is considered unsafe.

2. Firewall

All versions of Windows from XP (with Service Pack 2) onwards have a Firewall installed by default. Make sure yours is enabled – click on the Firewall option in the control panel to check. Your Firewall will block any attempts from less than reputable companies from dropping an unexpected package on your computer. (More on Firewalls in our next article)

3. Email Address

Most retailers on-line require you provide an email address. If you haven't got one already, go to 'google.co.uk' and get yourself a Gmail account. Your email address is often used as your log-in name when shopping on-line, make sure you choose a different password for your on-line shopping than the one you use for your email. If you don't want to be bombarded with spam emails from on-line shopping, set up another email specifically for on-line shopping.

4. Choose a reputable retailer

If you haven't heard of a retailer before, read reviews to find out what other consumers thought of their service. If you're following a 'link' from an email, check the address in the address bar to make sure the address is 'kosher'.

5. Look for contact details

Some online retailers do not provide sufficient contact details about themselves. Never buy from anyone who only has an email address listed. Make sure you print and save a telephone number and postal address.

6. Check delivery times

Check the delivery dates before you place your order to make sure your product will arrive in time.

7. Check total costs

Make sure you check the total costs when ordering online - often delivery is charged on top of the initial price listed.

8. Check the returns policy

Check the retailer's returns policy to find out what you need to do if the goods arrive faulty.

9. Look for the padlock and/or https://

Always make sure that the internet connection is secure when you're providing personal and payment information. We covered secure connections using Firefox in an earlier article – if the connection is secure, the web site name will begin with **https://**. If you are using a browser other than Firefox, you may also see a little padlock icon at the bottom of your web browser. In most cases, websites will tell you that you're entering a secure area of the site.

10. Pay by credit card

Paying by credit card will give you extra protection for anything you buy over the value of £100.00. So in case your product arrives damaged or you have problems, your credit card company will help you rectify the problem.

In addition to our Top Ten, please also bear the following in mind:

Print and save confirmation documents

Once you have made an online purchase, you will receive a confirmation order number or email. It is important that you print and save this information in case you need to chase up the order.

Know your rights

When you buy online, you have exactly the same rights as in a high street shop. More information can be found at the Office of Fair Trading website - www.offt.gov.uk. Please be aware however, that this may not be the case if you are buying from an on-line retailer outside of the UK.

Enjoy your on-line shopping experience, but be safe and think about your security.

See you next week, until then have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year - Happy Computing!