Video transcript: Online Shopping Tips

Day by day, more and more people are shopping online. It's convenient, and you can bring a world of choices to your computer, phone or tablet.

Are you one of the millions of people looking to buy something online? If you are, there are steps you can take to avoid hassles, get the right product at the right price, and protect your financial information.

First, plan ahead by setting a budget. Ask yourself, "How much do I want to spend?" Be sure to include delivery costs in your budget.

Second, determine what's most important to you about the item you're thinking about buying. What are the "must-have" product features? Are there features that would be nice to have, but you can live without? This will help you choose the product that meets your needs.

Take a few minutes to compare products. Type the name into a search engine along with words like "review," "complaint" or "scam."

Read online reviews from other people who bought the item or from product experts. Look for feedback about how well the product works and its overall quality.

If you've never heard of the company selling the product, look for reviews about their reputation and customer service. Read a few reviews so you're not relying on just one source.

Of course, you'll also want to know the total cost of the product.

Check shopping comparison sites to compare the price of the product at different websites. Remember, shipping costs and other "add-ons" may not be included in these prices. Look for online coupon codes. Search the store's name with terms like "coupons," "discounts," or "free shipping."

Before you decide where to buy, check out the terms of the deal. When will you get your order? The law requires sellers to ship items within 30 days of the sale. If you have to return the item, can you get a refund? Who pays for return shipping? Is there a restocking fee?

Next, decide how to pay.

Paying by credit card gives you some protections that other methods of payment may not. If there's a problem, the law gives you the right to dispute charges and temporarily withhold payment while your dispute is investigated. If someone uses your credit card without your permission, some companies will cap your liability at $50. Others will waive the charges entirely.

Before you enter your credit card or other financial information online, check if the website address starts with "https". The "s" stands for "secure" and means that your information is encrypted before it's transmitted.

Now, you should be ready to enjoy whatever you've bought online. If you have a problem with an online purchase or charge, try to work it out with the seller first.

If you can't resolve the problem, file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission, the nation's consumer protection agency, at ftc.gov/complaint.

By planning, comparing products and costs, and making sure you check out securely, you can make your online shopping experience safer—and more enjoyable.

Remember: it's easy to find trusted information about online security. Just visit OnGuardOnline.gov, the federal government's site to help you be safe, secure and responsible online.