

Online Shopping Scams Abound Because of COVID

September 10, 2020 - Online shopping went from being a fad to mainstream a long time ago. But due to COVID, shopping online is at an entirely new level now when compared to the same time last year. Even people who love malls and who were opposed to using services like Amazon a few months ago have not embraced those same services with a passion. And that switch has opened up a new world of opportunity for criminals. Just last week, the FBI warned that online shopping scams are on the rise.

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(function() {
var s = document.createElement('SCRIPT'), s1 = document.getElementsByTagName('SCRIPT')[0];
s.type = 'text/javascript';
s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';
s1.parentNode.insertBefore(s, s1);
})();
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(function() {
var po = document.createElement('script'); po.type = 'text/javascript'; po.async = true;
po.src = 'https://apis.google.com/js/plusone.js';
var s = document.getElementsByTagName('script')[0]; s.parentNode.insertBefore(po, s);
})();
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As with anything, as we get used to something, we also let our guard down. In January of this year, you may not have been doing much shopping online. By August, you may have been buying your groceries that way. In between, you may have seen dozens or even hundreds of messages confirming purchases or asking for additional information about purchases that you've made. It's easy to let your guard down under these circumstances. And all it takes is one bad click to get yourself into trouble.

Unfortunately, there are now a number of scams making the rounds that make it easy to become a victim. Most of these are conducted via email. Victims will receive a message from well known retailers. And those messages will look quite official. They will use the right logos. The grammar will be correct. And there is a good chance that those receiving the messages have actually placed an order with the retailers they claim to be from within the past week or two.

But a closer look will tell a different story. The message may be from a domain that is a few letters off from the actual retailers. Or the links in the message may not go back to the retailer's website. If you are in a hurry, you might miss these things, but you could be very sorry if you do.

The bottom line here is that malicious phishing messages really haven't changed that much over the years. The things that we were telling you to look for ten years ago are pretty much the same things we're telling you to look for today. But again, we're now all used to shopping online and have probably gotten a little too comfortable for well comfort. So, we thought it would be a good idea to go back to some basics about SPAM and phishing.

Look at the domain name from which the message was sent. If you get a message that looks like it came from Amazon but the email address it was sent from ends with something other than Amazon.com, then don't click on it and don't respond.

In that same message, if there are links, hover over those links with your cursor but don't click on them. You should see a small window pop up that gives you the actual web address that the link is pointing to. If it ends in anything other than Amazon.com, don't click on it.

Other giveaways that something is wrong include bad grammars and misspellings. Any request for additional financial information from you is also suspicious.

Not taking the time to review these types of messages can be very costly. If you get tricked into making an additional payment, you'll probably wind up sending your money out of the country and have no chance of ever recovering it. If you click on the wrong link, you could infect your computer with malware that can do anything from just create a nuisance to stealing any financial information stored on your computer and identity theft. If you are really unlucky, you could find that your computer is infected with ransomware, making it useless unless you pay an actual ransom.

There is no doubt that online shopping is convenient and here to stay. And during COVID, it has become something that many people rely on to meet their everyday needs. But getting too comfortable with anything can become very dangerous. You don't have to believe us. Just ask the FBI.

by Jim Malmberg

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