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Perils and Pitfalls of Buying Technology Online

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Shopping online for computers and personal technology has never been easier. Tech savvy shoppers can quickly compare and find the best prices, get updated product specs and read user reviews online in order to make better purchasing decisions. Here are the main options available to Canadians.



Store aggregator portals like **Online Shoppers** and **Cyber Shopping.ca** are virtual malls that offer links to e-tailers. Google's **Product Search** service, formerly known as Froogle, scours the web for products and the lowest prices available.

Aside from online auction giant, **eBay**, which makes it possible to bid for objects of desire from all over the world, free classified services like **Craigslist** and **Kijiji** make local bargain hunting more efficient specially for buying second hand electronics or older items.

Manufacturers themselves offer a number of options for saving people money Apple, Dell, Lenovo, Sony and others offer substantial savings on their refurbished products and previous generation items on clearance on their online stores.

Refurbished doesn't always mean used, these items are often returns that go through stringent inspection before they sold again. I've often bought refurbished computers and despite lacking the regular packaging and extras, the products look and work like new plus they often have the same warranties as new items.

What to Look Out For

Online shopping is convenient and can save people money if used properly. Online merchants who accept credit cards and PayPal transactions make it possible to process purchases in a matter of seconds. They also make impulse buying and overspending, all too easy.

Canadian shoppers purchasing from international retailers need to be careful with possible shipping, insurance as well as customs charges added on that can turn an online bargain into a luxury expense.

This is why local classified services such as Cragislist and Kijiji have gained unprecedented popularity because, when they work as advertised, you can transact locally, get your item sooner and generally inspect it before you pay.

While infinitely more convenient to use by cutting out the virtual middleman, it is a lot easier for you to get seriously scammed using these online classified services.

As a rule, one should never use PayPal, Western Union Money Transfers or any quick pay service for transactions done through online classifieds. Cash purchases are preferred and only after purchased items are thoroughly inspected to the buyer's satisfaction.

Unlike eBay and other auction portals, free classified services have no account management system; no user feedback and ratings mechanism and no way to effectively track how transactions take place.

While eBay and auction sites in general, charge fees for use from sellers and buyers, part of the service is in protecting their customers from nefarious practices. By tracking transactions and gathering feedback, auction sites can police their members and to a certain degree, ensure that most of the transactions taking place are fair and legitimate.

If you ever purchase an item over eBay that is damaged or not as described, then you can force an investigation into the matter and perhaps even get a refund from PayPal or your credit card company. If the same scenario happened over Craigslist or Kijiji, the buyer would be pretty much helpless.

In with the New, Out with the Old

Buying new computers or electronics means that you're probably replacing older models. If these are still working, there are suitable options to just throwing them out as scrap.

You can definitely sell them online using the free and paid services mentioned above just be sure to take good photos as well as offer detailed descriptions of all the product's features as well as their defects. If you price it right and describe it correctly, you'll likely find a willing buyer.



If you'd rather trade in or donate your older models, there are options for that too. Many manufacturers offer recycling programs for old or obsolete computers that can lead to a discount incentive on a new model.

Renewed Computer Technology does a commendable job of refurbishing and redistributing equipment, keeping them out of landfills and extending their usefulness to those who need them the most.

RCT's first commitment is to provide donated computers to schools and then to not-for-profit organizations across Ontario. Unusable or obsolete equipment is recycled using the highest standards.

RCT's steady efforts have resulted in 60,450 hours of youth computer training and delivery over 27,208 computers to schools, charities and not-for-profits last year.

In a similar vein, **reBOOT Canada** accepts computer donations from companies and individuals. They refurbish and distribute these and have assisted over 7,000 charities across Canada.

Another convenient option is **Goodwill** that is also experienced at refurbishing and offering used electronics at affordable prices.

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