

Safer online shopping.

If it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Shopping online – it's something most of us do regularly. It's fast, convenient, and best of all, often cheaper than shopping at physical stores. But with all the benefits comes an element of risk – the possibility that the item you just purchased isn't genuine, or worse, simply won't arrive. Then there's always the risk of having your sensitive personal data stolen (such as credit card information).

But it's not all doom and gloom. With a few simple tips, you'll know what to look out for and can shop online with confidence.

Does it seem too good to be true?

Sometimes it doesn't take much technical know-how to spot a scam – a little common sense can go a long way. Like the adage says, if something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

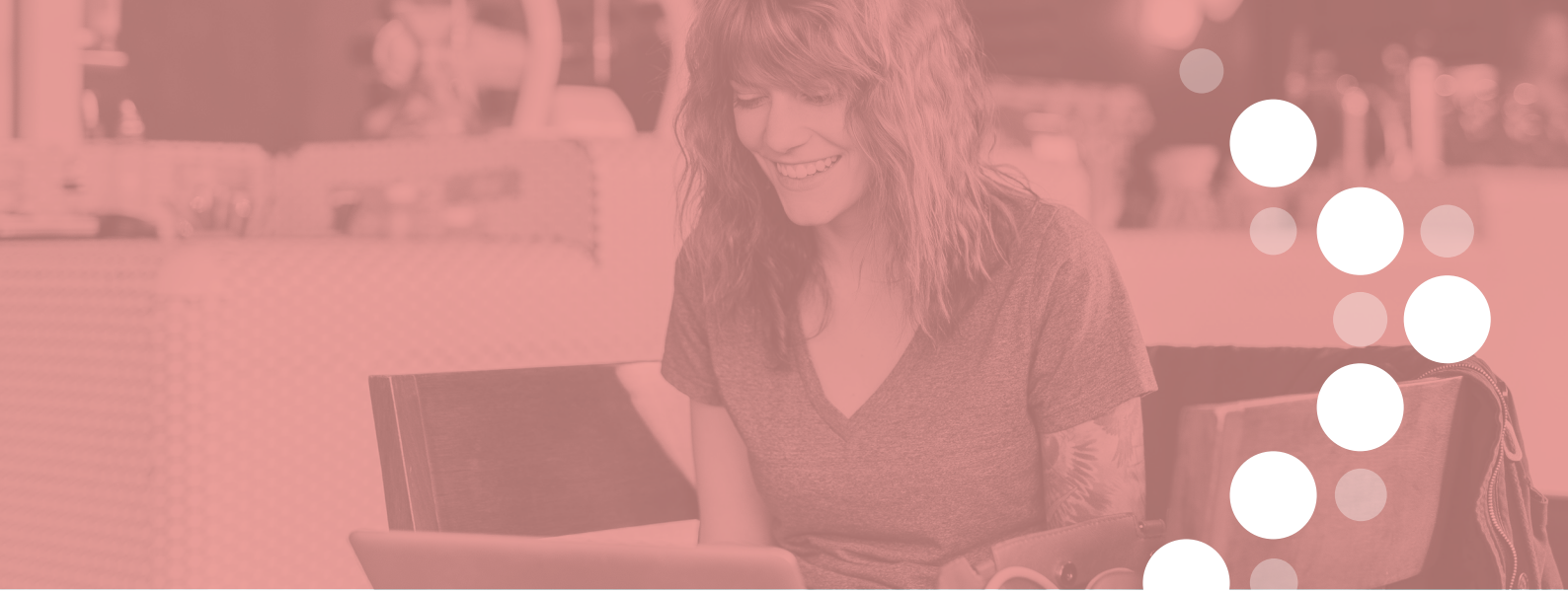
Unbelievably large discounts on brand name products, or promotions that guarantee large prizes are two examples. If the website you're visiting seems like it might not be legitimate, there are a few more easy checks you can do to help decide whether to proceed with your purchase.

Check the domain name

You can see the domain name by checking the address bar at the top of your browser. If the text in the address bar doesn't seem to match the content of the website, the site may not be legitimate. If it's a domain name that ends in .nz, you can find out who the domain name holder is by doing a registration data query at the DNC website (dnc.org.nz). Check who's listed in the Registrant Name field.

If the domain name ends in .com, you can use ICANN's WHOIS service (whois.icann.org).

The screenshot shows the Domain Name Commission NZ website. The navigation bar includes links for 'The Commission', '.nz Complaints', 'Resources', 'Registrars', and 'Individual Privacy'. A search bar is located on the right. The main content area is titled '.nz Query' and features a 'Domain Search' button. Below the search bar, there is a section for 'Domain Name Registration Data Query' which explains that .nz domain name registration information can be searched by domain name. It also mentions that the ability to search for this information is referred to as a domain name registration data query ('Query'), or a domain name search. A note states that a number of protections will be in place to protect .nz registrant information from being harvested, including CAPTCHA and service rate-limiting. By performing a 'Query', you are also agreeing to be bound by the Terms of Use of the service. A final note indicates that you can perform a 'Query' by using the search domains box above, and that instructions on how to perform a 'Query' will be made available shortly. On the right side of the page, there are sections for 'Status Types' (Registered, Pending Release, Available, Prohibited, Conflicted, Resolved) and 'Consultations' (Dispute Resolution Service 2019, 19 June 2019). A 'News' section is also visible at the bottom right.



Look for the padlock

When purchasing items online, make sure the site is secure – you can check this by looking for the padlock symbol in the address bar of your browser. Make sure you only enter credit or debit card details on a site that has the padlock symbol, and “https://” in front of the web address. It’s important to note the padlock doesn’t signify that you’re completely safe. It simply means that data transmitted between your browser and the site is encrypted. Enterprising scammers can and do build secure websites to give them a greater appearance of credibility.

A quick web search goes a long way

If you’re concerned about the legitimacy of an online business, a quick web search will go a long way towards either alleviating or reaffirming your concerns. Search the name of the website or business with the terms “scam” or “review” after it. Chances are, if the site is a scam, others have already been burned and may have posted reviews online.

Making a decision

Deciding whether to go ahead with your online purchase can be difficult. The precautions listed above can help you determine the trustworthiness of a site, and by taking these extra steps, you can make a more informed decision. If you’re still not sure, you can always ask the experts.

If you’re not sure, ask the experts

Still not sure? Don’t hesitate to contact one of the organisations listed below.

- Domain Name Commission (dnc.org.nz) is responsible for regulating the .nz domain name space. The Commission can help with any enquiries or complaints regarding .nz domain names.
- CERT NZ (cert.govt.nz) can provide practical guidance on how to keep your information safe and secure online.
- Netsafe (netsafe.org.nz) is New Zealand’s independent, non-profit online safety organisation. Their website has a lot of helpful information on how you can stay safe in all aspects of your online life.

