

Watch your back: Payment scams common in online buying and selling



Shopping on the Internet can be fun, convenient and a great way to find bargains or unusual merchandise. Similarly, selling unwanted items through online commerce sites can be a win-win for all involved. But not everyone is honest, and if you're not aware of potential scams, online buying and selling can be a good way to get cheated out of your hard-earned money.

[The U.S. Census Bureau](#) reports that retail e-commerce sales have been steadily rising since 2006. Most recently, the second quarter of 2015 showed nationwide online sales of \$83.9 billion, accounting for 7.2 percent of all retail sales and representing a 14.1 percent seasonally adjusted increase from the second quarter of 2014.

The unsuspecting can easily encounter imposter buyers and sellers intent on getting something for nothing, according to financial services company Western Union. Anyone can be a victim.

Beware of scams

In one of the common scams, a "buyer" pays for merchandise by mailing the seller a counterfeit check worth more than the selling price, and asks the seller to wire the difference back to them via a money transfer. Before the check can bounce, the "buyer" picks up the money transfer, making off with the money. In this case, the seller is out the amount of the check and the amount of money sent via money transfer.

In other cases, a "seller" claims not to accept credit cards or checks, but only money transfers. When the buyer is skeptical, the "seller" informs the buyer they can send the money transfer in someone else's name (such as a friend or relative) and then can change the name to the "seller's" name once the merchandise is received. In the meantime, the "seller" creates a fake I.D. to collect the money transfer, never sending the merchandise.

Tips for buyers and sellers

Western Union offers the following advice when buying or selling online:

- *Never send a money transfer for an online purchase to an individual.
- *Never send money to someone you haven't met in person.
- * Never send funds from a check deposited into your account until it officially clears — a process that can take weeks depending on your bank and the amount of the check.
- * Don't provide your banking information to those you don't know, including unfamiliar businesses.

For more information on common scams and fraud awareness, check out [Western Union's Fraud Awareness Center](#) at wu.com/fraudawareness. If you believe you may be a victim of fraud using Western Union, call the Western Union Fraud Hotline number at 1-800-448-1492.