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For Immediate Release:

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Be a smart Internet shopper

ARDMORE, Okla. – With today’s hectic lifestyles, many more people are enjoying the convenience of shopping online.

There are many benefits to shopping online, said Sissy Osteen, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service family resource management specialist.

“Shopping via the Internet is fast, efficient and provides consumers with easy access to comparison shopping,” Osteen said. “In addition, the Internet provides you with the opportunity to shop at stores you don’t have locally and you don’t even have to get in your car and drive.”

While shopping online can be enjoyable, make sure it is a safe experience as well.

To start with, make sure the browser, the software used to navigate the Internet, complies with industry security standards. These standards encrypt, or scramble, the purchase information shoppers send over the Internet.

“Most Internet purchases must be made with a credit card, unless you have a gift card for that particular store,” she said. “Be sure to verify the online security before making a purchase. Also, keep a record of your purchase orders and confirmation numbers.”

Osteen also advises consumers to shop with companies they know. If you are not familiar with a company, request a catalog be sent to you in the mail. This will give you a better idea about the company’s merchandise and services. The catalog should also detail refund and return policies.

In addition, you can check how online stores are rated by customers who have used them. The Web site www.resellerratings.com is an excellent source for determining who the best online retailers are.

“Use caution when shopping online. When a deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is,” she said. “Also be wary of companies that claim to have a special overseas connection or those that don’t allow e-mail replies.”

Consumers should guard their personal information and be aware of who they may be sharing it with. Do not give out personal information unless you know who is collecting it, why they want it and how it is going to be used.

Get creative when establishing passwords for various online shopping venues. The best passwords combine numbers, letters and symbols. Avoid using common words. In addition, keep your passwords private.

Make sure you have a virus protection program on your computer before going online. Files that you download may contain secret programs or be attached to e-mails. These files could collect personal information about you without your knowledge.

“Just as you would take precautions while shopping in a brick and mortar store, consumers need to be careful when shopping online, too,” Osteen said. “Online shopping can open a whole new world to consumers.”

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