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Lockdown wardrobe clear out? Citizens Advice gives top tips to help people sell and buy second hand safely

Citizens Advice has found that a staggering 96% of UK adults have bought something online since the country first went into lockdown in March.

With people using lockdown to clear out their unwanted clothes or dust off their crafting skills, many have started selling on online marketplaces like eBay, Etsy and Depop.

These lockdown trends combined with the growing interest in sustainable fashion have led to more people needing advice about using online marketplaces. The number of people seeking help from Citizens Advice about these platforms has increased by over a quarter (28%) in the last year.

The national charity has helped consumers with issues like mis-selling, failed deliveries, and poor quality items. Citizens Advice has seen a 160% increase in the number of cases of people being scammed on online marketplaces over the last year.

Georgia, 17 from Liverpool, works for a bank and helps customers who have been scammed. She paid £150 for shoes that were advertised on an online marketplace, but they never arrived: "The seller asked me to pay via bank transfer. I was a bit sceptical because we warn people against doing this as part of my job, but the seller told me that they had problems with their PayPal account so couldn't receive the money any other way. When the shoes didn't arrive I messaged the seller constantly, but they didn't reply for a long time. Eventually they just said "it's too late now" and blocked me."

May, who often uses online marketplaces, sold a pair of brand-new AirPods for £140. She thought that she was receiving payment through a trusted website, but later realised that the site was impersonating a leading platform:

"A couple of days passed and I realised I still hadn't received the money. I looked back at the email I got from the payment platform, and noticed it wasn't from an official account. I tried to message the buyer, but they had deleted their account. That's when I realised I had been scammed! I bet the scammer has done this to other people as they know they can just get away with it."

Jenny, a 26-year-old Londoner, is a regular online shopper. This year alone five of her parcels have been lost, including a £230 Depop order:

“It’s impossible to get in touch with the delivery company’s customer care, it’s so frustrating. I had to jump through so many hoops to resolve the issue, including tracking down the delivery company’s representatives online - it was a joke.”

As people become reliant on online shopping during the winter lockdown, Kate Hobson, Senior Consumer Expert, says:

“Now more than ever, people need to know how to use online marketplaces safely. These platforms are great for selling your pre-loved clothes to make some extra cash during these tough times, or supporting small businesses while doing your Christmas shopping. But, Citizens Advice has seen even the savviest of shoppers run into difficulties, so it’s important to shop-smart and know your rights, so you can take action if things don’t go to plan.”

Here are Kate’s five top tips for buying and selling on online marketplaces:

1. Buyers, do your research: Check the item description and photos, where it is being shipped from and the contact details of the seller. Read the reviews for the person you are buying from, as these could flag potential issues, but be aware that exaggerated comments may not be real.
2. Only send and receive money through the online marketplace app or website: Bank transfers have limited protection if things go wrong, so avoid using them. Instead, use the online marketplace app, debit/credit card or PayPal Goods and Services (not Family and Friends). Take a screenshot of your transactions, the advert of the item and the buyer/seller’s details, in case things go wrong.
3. Spot fake goods: If the seller claims that the item is from a popular brand, check that it’s genuine before splashing your cash. Research the features of the genuine product (e.g. engravings or specific details that would be hard to copy) and check whether you can see these in the seller’s photos of the item. Compare the price of the item you want to buy to similar items online - if a deal appears too good to be true, it probably is. Ask the seller for receipts or proof of authentication, and see whether they have the original packaging. You can report traders who sell fake or counterfeit goods to Trading Standards via the [Citizens Advice Consumer Service](#).
4. Know your rights: The ‘buyer beware’ principle applies to individual sellers on online marketplaces. This means that sellers must describe the item accurately, but they don’t have to disclose any faults. If the seller doesn’t describe the item accurately or uses photos of a different item in the advert, the seller must offer a refund.
5. If you do have a problem - contact the buyer or seller: Explain what has happened, how you’d like them to fix it and give them a deadline to respond. If you can’t resolve the issue this way, see if there’s an [alternative dispute resolution](#) service that you could use.

If you can't resolve the issue or would like extra guidance on your rights, you can contact the Citizens Advice consumer helpline on 0808 223 1133 or on 0808 223 1144 for Welsh-language speakers.

Notes to editors

1. Figures relating to problems with delivery derive from Citizens Advice commissioned polling. Citizens Advice commissioned Yonder Data Solutions to carry out a survey of

2029 18+ UK adults between 23 October to 25 October 2020. Fieldwork was carried out online.

2. Figures relating to Citizens Advice service relate to comparisons made between 1st March to 31st August 2019 and 1st March to 31st August 2020.
3. Citizens Advice includes the national charity; the network of independent local Citizens Advice charities across England and Wales; the Citizens Advice consumer service; and the Witness Service.
4. Citizens Advice is the statutory consumer advocate for energy and post. We provide supplier performance information to consumers and policy analysis to decision makers.
5. The Citizens Advice Witness Service provides free, independent support for prosecution and defence witnesses in every criminal court in England and Wales.
6. Citizens Advice offers Pension Wise services at 500 locations in England and Wales.
7. Citizens Advice's services are free, independent, confidential and impartial, and available to all regardless of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, age or nationality.
8. To get advice online or find your local Citizens Advice, visit citizensadvice.org.uk
9. For consumer advice, call the Citizens Advice consumer service on 0808 223 1133 or 0808 223 1144 to talk in Welsh.
10. We helped 2.6 million people face to face, by phone, email and webchat in 2017-18. For service statistics see [our monthly publication Advice trends](#).
11. Citizens Advice staff are supported by over 23,000 trained volunteers, working at over 2,500 locations in England and Wales.

We give people the knowledge and confidence they need to find their way forward - whoever they are, and whatever their problem.