

Tips For Shopping By Mail, Telephone, or Online

Shopping by mail, telephone, or online can be a time and energy-saving way to buy almost anything you want at any time you want. Most direct marketers provide toll-free ordering and quick delivery to meet the needs of their customers.

Whether you are experienced at shopping direct or a beginner, you may occasionally have questions. For instance, who is responsible for return postage on an item of clothing that does not fit? How long should it take for gift baskets ordered by mail to be delivered? How can you continue to receive only the catalogs you want without receiving unwanted mailings?

These “tips” take the guesswork out of shopping direct. [The Mail or Telephone Order Merchandise Rule](#) (the “30-Day Rule”), which is enforced by the Federal Trade Commission, applies to orders placed via computer as well as through the mail or by telephone.

The Direct Marketing Association (DMA), the largest and oldest trade association of direct marketers, and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) prepared this information to help you when shopping direct.

Keep in mind that common sense is required when shopping by mail, telephone, or online. If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is.



Helpful Guidelines

Here are some guidelines that will help you when shopping direct:

-  Before ordering, check the company’s return policy.
-  Keep a record of your order, including the company’s name, address, and telephone number; identifying information about the item you purchased; your cancelled check, a copy of your money order, or the credit card used; and the date you placed the order.
-  Never send cash.
-  If merchandise is damaged, contact the company immediately. If you’re asked to return it, get a receipt from the shipper.
-  If you do not receive your order and your package is lost in transit, the company will probably take responsibility for tracing it — another reason record-keeping is so important.



-  If your prepaid order is not shipped when promised, you may cancel the order and get a full refund. If the company did not give you a shipping date in its solicitation (for example, "allow four to six weeks for shipment"), the company must ship your prepaid order within 30 days of receiving enough information to process it.
-  If you cancel an order charged on your credit card, the seller must credit your account within one billing cycle.
-  If you return merchandise to a company, get a return receipt from the shipper.
-  When you buy CDs, DVDs, books, collectibles, etc. through membership in a negative option club or plan, the FTC's [Prenotification Negative Option Rule](#) gives a minimum of 10 days after you receive notification in which to decide if you want to receive the selection. If you want the merchandise, do nothing, and it will be sent automatically. If you do not want the merchandise, tell the company by returning the form.
-  If you ever get something that you didn't order (and it is not from your negative option or club plan) you can keep it without paying for it. According to the FTC, it's your legal right.
-  If you enjoy shopping by mail, telephone, or online, visit www.DMAchoice.org where consumers are in charge. You can choose what commercial communications you receive in your mail and email boxes — opt-out of mailings you would prefer not to receive and have the added benefit of opting-in to get the catalogs, magazines, or other commercial mailings you do want. Return to the site at any time to change and customize your preferences as often as you like. ■

