

Results of the 14th annual holiday spending survey, conducted by the Consumer Federation of America and the Credit Union National Association, reveal that more consumers are planning to spend more money this year than last year. Whatever you're spending plans, holiday shopping season is upon us and we're quickly approaching one of the most significant shopping events of the year – Black Friday. If you're planning to do any of your Black Friday shopping online or shopping on Cyber Monday, there are special considerations to protect your finances.

Pre-shop and comparison shop. You won't know if it's a good deal unless you know the regular full retail price. You can pre-shop before the sale starts to know what items might interest you and which retailers provide the items you want. It's easy to comparison shop online to make sure you are getting the best price. Sale ads and even sales often begin before Black Friday. You can start browsing early in the week.

Watch out for frauds and scams. Cybercrooks may create phony sites and ads to lure you in. The goal is to obtain your personal information. Beware of "free" promotions or anything that sounds too good to be true. Before you enter your credit card or other financial information online, check if the website address starts with "https". The "s" stands for "secure" and means that your information is encrypted before it's transmitted. Be sure your virus protection software is up to date.

Use the right card. If you pay by credit or charge card online, your transaction will be protected by the Fair Credit Billing Act. Under this law, you can dispute charges under certain circumstances and temporarily withhold payment while the creditor investigates them. In the event that someone uses your credit card without your permission, your liability generally is limited to the first \$50 in charges. Some companies guarantee that you won't be held responsible for any unauthorized charges made to your card online; some cards provide additional warranty, return, and purchase protection benefits. Be sure to check the rules for your credit or debit card before deciding which card to use.

Read warranty and return policies. Will you or the person receiving the gift be able to return it? What happens if the product is damaged or defective? There may be fees associated with returns. It's a good idea to read the warranty and return policies, especially for more expensive items.

Check your statement. You don't have to wait until your bank or credit card statement comes in the mail. Check your statement online to make sure that you were charged the correct price and charged only once. If you find errors, contact the company where you purchased the item. You may also need to contact the credit card company or your bank to alert them of inaccurate charges.

Find more tips for holiday spending at www.uaex.edu

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