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Everyone who uses phones in public warned of one common action to avoid

The festive season is a prime target for cyber-criminals

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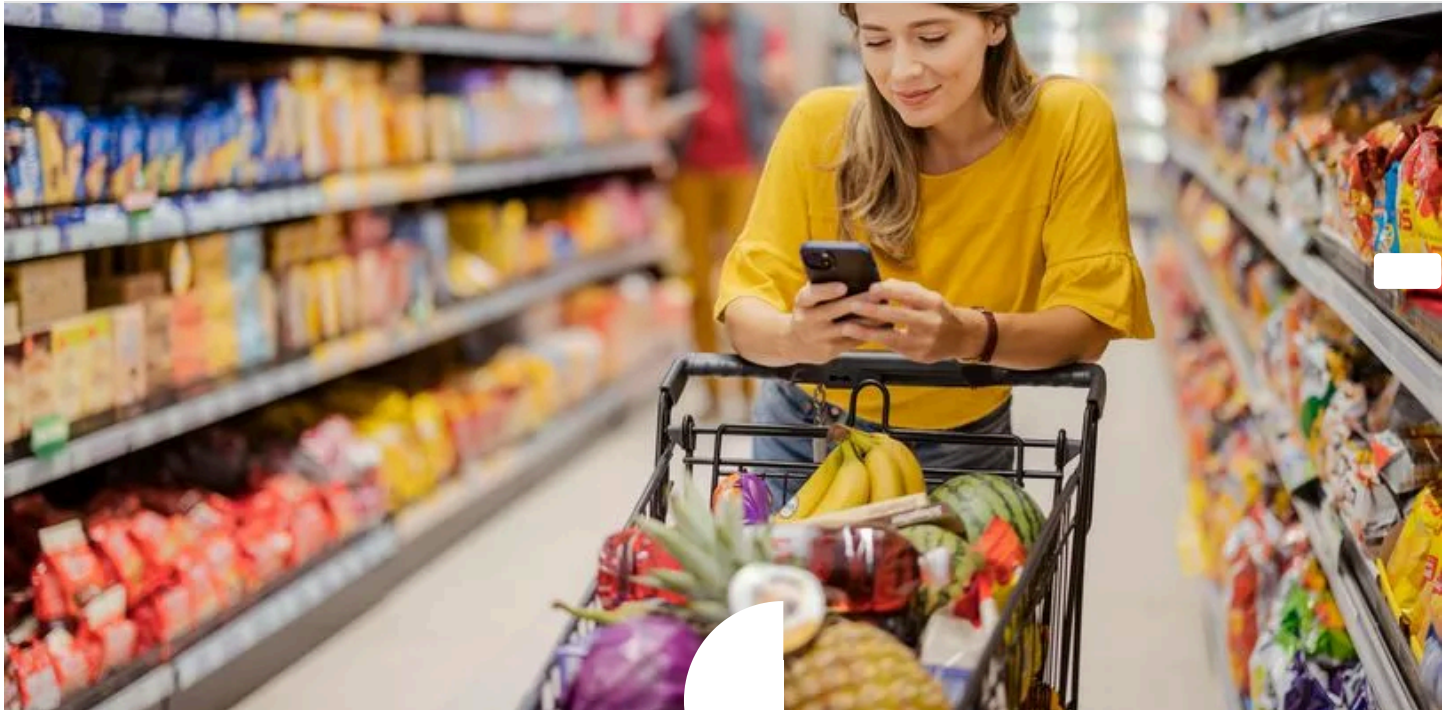
By [Stephanie Colderick](#) 20:13, 17 DEC 2023 | UPDATED 20:19, 17 DEC 2023

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📱 We're all on our phones and online while out & about

In the run-up to Christmas, lots of us are stressing about the **Christmas** shopping we need to do while dashing to shops and quickly ordering online. This makes the festive season a prime target for cyber-criminals and there are some easy ways to protect yourself.

While out shopping you might be considering what you can also buy online and while it is tempting to make use of the free public wifi in public areas, a cyber security expert is advising you not to. This is because criminals can intercept the data that is transferred across such open and unsecured wifi.

Rachael Medhurst, course leader and senior lecturer in cyber security NCSA at the University of South Wales, advises everyone to avoid using public wifi and to especially avoid using public wifi when conducting any financial transactions. **Rachael also gave other tips** when **Christmas shopping** online.

Writing in The Conversation, Rachel said: "If you are out shopping in towns or city centres, there will often be a large number of public wifi options available to you. However, criminals can intercept the data that is transferred across such open and unsecured wifi. So, avoid using public wifi where possible, especially when conducting any financial transactions."

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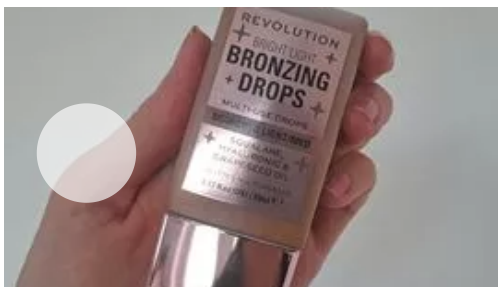
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- Before entering your personal and financial information on any website, ensure it's legitimate and secure. Look for the "https" in the address bar and a padlock icon, which indicates a secure and encrypted connection.
- When creating passwords for online shopping accounts, use strong, unique combinations of letters, numbers and symbols. Avoid using the same password for multiple accounts, as a breach on one site could compromise all your others.
- As with shopping in the real world, be cautious when encountering offers that are significantly below usual prices or which make extravagant promises. Always conduct thorough research on the seller and product before making a purchase. If a deal seems too good to be true, it probably is.

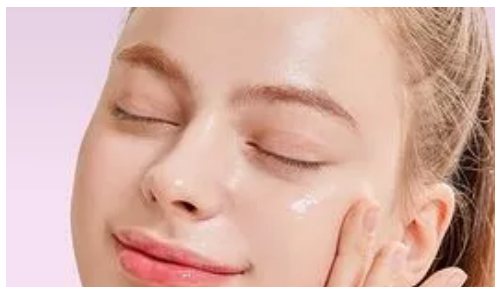
Package delivery scams

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Rachel said: "As well as being a time for giving and receiving gifts, the festive season is also ripe for cybercriminals to exploit the excitement surrounding package deliveries. Scammers often pose as legitimate delivery companies, sending emails or text messages claiming that a delivery attempt was unsuccessful or requiring additional fees for processing, or even customs clearance. Typically, these messages contain links or phone numbers that, when clicked or called, lead to fake websites or automated phone systems designed to collect

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the information doesn't match or seems suspicious, don't click any links or provide personal details.

- Legitimate delivery companies will never ask for upfront payment or sensitive information through unsolicited messages or calls.
- Remember, cybercriminals are skilled at manipulating the festive spirit to their advantage. Stay vigilant, exercise caution, and don't let your excitement for gifts and deliveries compromise your cybersecurity.

Social media scams

Rachel says social media platforms are "a go-to for scammers" for scams and malware". Her advice is:

- Be wary when interacting with posts and direct messages, especially if they contain suspicious links or attachments.
- Before clicking on anything, hover over the link to verify its destination. If it shows a website you don't recognise or seems unrelated to the message, do not click on it.
- If you receive a message from someone you know but the content seems strange or out of character, contact them directly through a trusted channel to verify its authenticity.
- Be wary of messages containing urgent requests for money or personal information from businesses. Genuine organisations will never solicit sensitive details through social media.
- There are many buy and sell platforms available on social media. But while such platforms can be a great place to find a unique gift, it is also important to remember that not all sellers may be legitimate. So, it's vital that you don't share your bank details.
- If the seller sends a link to purchase the item, do not use it.
- When meeting to collect an item, it's generally safer to use cash rather than transferring funds electronically.

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