

## Online Shopping Safety: Credit Card, Debit Card or Check?



Merchants are making online shopping increasingly convenient by accepting not just credit cards, but debit cards and checks. However, according to the Privacy Rights Clearinghouse (PRC), the safest way to shop online is with a credit card. If something goes wrong, you're protected under the federal Fair Credit Billing Act.

Here are other online shopping tips from PRC:

- Use one credit card exclusively for all your online shopping. This makes it easier to spot unauthorized charges.
- Don't pay for online purchases with a check, since checks are vulnerable to bank fraud. Even mailing a check or money order won't give you any protection if you have problems with the purchase.
- Use a true credit card—not a debit card, check card or an ATM card. A debit card exposes your bank account to thieves. Your checking account could be wiped out in minutes. Also, federal law does not protect debit and ATM cards as extensively as it does credit cards.
- Use a “virtual credit card,” if possible. Some banks are now offering their credit card customers a free service called single-use card numbers. Virtual credit cards use a randomly-generated, substitute account number so you never need to give out your real credit card number online, over the phone or through the mail.

Among the card companies offering this service are Citibank, who calls its program Virtual Account Number; Bank of America's service is called ShopSafe and Discover calls its service Secure Online Account Number. You specify the expiration date and credit limit, which adds a layer of protection. Once used, the card is tied to the merchant where it was used, and cannot be used elsewhere

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Source: CAI