

Black Friday warning: shoppers urged to protect themselves online as figures reveal rising losses to scams

UK's cyber security and law enforcement bodies warn bargain hunters about cyber criminal scams and support turning on 2-step verification (2SV) to protect online accounts.

- Heads of UK's cyber and law enforcement agencies issue warning ahead of peak online shopping season
- Shoppers lost over £11 million to cyber criminals during last year's festive shopping period, with clothing, high-end tech products and cars among the most common products cited
- Figures released as NCSC launches national campaign to encourage people to turn on 2-step verification (2SV) to help protect their online accounts

THE UK'S CYBER SECURITY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT CHIEFS have today issued an urgent alert to Black Friday bargain hunters after new figures revealed rising losses to online scammers during the festive shopping season.

Clothing, high-end tech products and even cars were among the products featuring in scams as GCHQ's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and Action Fraud revealed that Brits **reported losing over £11.5 million to online criminals** between November 2023 and January 2024 – with **each victim losing £695 on average**.

This compares to reported losses amounting to £10.6 million the previous year.

The new figures are published on the same day as the NCSC launches a nationwide campaign, as part of [Stop! Think Fraud](#), to encourage people to set-up 2-step verification on their most important accounts.

The latest figures, which come from reports made to Action Fraud and analysed by the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB), revealed that 7,168 reports (43%)

mentioned a social media platform, with online marketplaces being mentioned in 18.9% of reports.

The figures also revealed that those aged 30–39 submitted the largest number of reports (23%), closely followed by 40–49-year-olds (20%). The average age of victims was 42.

Lord Hanson, Fraud Minister, said:

“We know that more needs to be done to tackle online fraud.

“That’s why we are delighted to support initiatives like this, through the Stop! Think Fraud campaign, which provide practical, actionable advice to the public to stay safe from scams.

“And our message to anyone shopping online as we approach Black Friday is simple: if you come across anything that doesn’t feel right – stop what you’re doing, break contact, and do not click any links.

“This government is committed to defeating this scourge and we will continue our work with industry and other partners to better protect the public from this appalling crime.”

No one is immune to fraud, so shoppers are encouraged to exercise vigilance against tactics that push them to act quickly without thinking. Criminals often create false urgency by using limited-time offers or promoting items that seem scarce or not widely available.

If you’ve seen something that doesn’t feel right, stop.

- Break the contact and don’t click on any links
- Research the company or seller by looking at reviews on trusted review sites

Shoppers can also protect their online accounts by setting up two-step verification which provides an extra layer of protection and means that even if a criminal knows your password, they still won’t be able to access it.

Adam Mercer, Deputy Head of Action Fraud, said:

“Everyone will be looking to snap up good Black Friday deals and bargains whilst shopping this festive period, but unfortunately this doesn’t stop fraudsters from targeting members of the public online.

“With Action Fraud data revealing more than 16,000 reports of online shopping fraud over last year’s festive period, we are urging people to shop safely online – especially if you’re buying on social media – and avoid being left empty handed for the holiday season.

“Never feel pressured into buying anything online – creating a false sense of urgency is a tell-tale sign of a fraudster. Whether you are shopping on online marketplaces, social media or retailers, avoid bank transfers if you can, and use a credit card as it can provide more protection if anything goes wrong.

“You can protect yourself from fraudsters this festive season by following the practical advice on the Stop! Think Fraud website to help you shop online safely.”

NCSC CEO Richard Horne said:

“As we head into the holiday shopping season, people are understandably eager to find the best deals online.

“Unfortunately, this is also prime time for cyber criminals, who exploit bargain hunters with increasingly sophisticated scams – sometimes crafted using AI – making them harder to detect.

“To stay protected, I strongly recommend following our online shopping guidance, including setting up 2-step verification and creating memorable but secure passwords using three random words.”

For more information on how to protect yourself, search for [“Stop! Think Fraud”](#).

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