

CONSUMER REPORTS WARNS AGAINST THE TOP SEVEN ONLINE BLUNDERS

The Most Common Mistakes that Can Cause Data Loss and Identity Theft

YONKERS, NY — Consumers beware – careless online behavior can lead to serious issues, such as a ruined computer or identity theft. In its September issue, *Consumer Reports* identifies [seven of the most common online errors](#) and offers advice on what consumers can do to avoid a Web disaster. The worst missteps include:

1. **Assuming your security software is protecting you.** Because security software is fully effective only when activated and frequently updated, consumers must renew their subscriptions when they expire. Most software requires an annual subscription fee, so pay up to stay covered.
2. **Accessing an account through an e-mail link.** Clicking on an embedded Web link can give cybercriminals account access, and lead to identity theft. Even the most official-looking e-mail messages can be fraudulent, so access online accounts only by typing the institution's Web address in a browser.
3. **Using a single password for all online accounts.** Using one password for all accounts provides easy access for someone looking to steal a consumer's identity. Try using variations on one password—the best passwords use a combination of at least eight letters, numbers, or punctuation symbols.
4. **Downloading free software.** Free downloads often come at the price of added spyware which can slow down your computer. To avoid spyware, download freeware from reputable sites like SnapFiles.com and Download.com.
5. **Thinking your Mac shields you from all risks.** Phishing scams are just as much a threat to Mac users as Windows users. Since Apple's Safari browser has no phishing protection, users should try Firefox or Opera instead.
6. **Clicking on a pop-up ad that says your PC insecure.** Clicking on a pop-up is never a good idea. Avoid accidentally opening the pop-up by carefully clicking on the "close button" or get rid of pop-ups altogether by enabling the browser's pop-up blocker.
7. **Shopping online the same way you do in stores.** To avoid scams, use a separate credit card for Internet purchases and don't use a debit card. Or get a virtual account number from your credit-card company, which is good for only one purchase for a specific vendor.



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The latest issue of *Consumer Reports* also includes test results of security software and ratings on the latest laptop and desktop computers. The report also includes an extensive investigation into ID leaks, and why the government is one of the biggest culprits when it comes to exposing personal information. For more information on the "Seven Online Blunders" and the entire computer protection package, check out the September issue of *Consumer Reports* on newsstands August 5, 2008 or visit www.ConsumerReports.org.

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