# Top five tips for finding advice and information on the internet

**1  Don't believe everything you read**

Many websites promise great savings in terms of time and money, and give the impression that they will do extensive research on your behalf. There are some websites that are comprehensive and impartial but with others you may end up wasting time and getting information that is incomplete, out of date or influenced by commercial interests. Approach websites with caution, and check out how they operate before making decisions based on the site's information.

**2  Don't rely on just one site**

If you are looking for information or a good deal, you should always use a number of sites and compare the results, rather than relying on one site. But beware of different shopping sites that use the same search engine to find their prices, and therefore end up with similar results. It's always a good idea to compare the best price you can find online with offline prices as a double-check.

**3  Check the site's background**

Make sure you have an idea of who you are dealing with by doing the following.

● Look for a business name, a geographical ('real-world') address, and other contact details for the business.

● If it's a site that appears to give general information and advice, find out who is behind it. Check who owns the site and whether there are any partners and sponsors who might have a vested interest in the information provided.

● If it's a site that recommends products or deals, look for any claims about whether its recommendations are impartial, or whether it is clear about commercial influences on its recommendations. If it lists deals for you, look at how those deals are ordered – if they are not in price or alphabetical order, a retailer or manufacturer may have paid to have their product placed in a more prominent position.

**4  Check how reliable the information is**

● If the site gives advice, look for the authority and credentials of the people behind that advice. Look for sources for its advice, so that you can find out for yourself whether it is something you would be prepared to rely on.

● If the site recommends products and prices, check whether it explains how much of the market is covered in its searches, and how up to date its deals are.

**5  Check what risks you might be taking by using the site**

● Provide only personal information that you think is necessary to use the site or complete the transaction. Many sites collect personal data when they don't need to.

● Read the site's privacy policy, particularly if you're asked to give personal information. Check how your personal data will be used, and if you have the option of refusing unsolicited mail, e-mail or calls. (Within the EU, it is against the law for businesses to use your personal details for marketing purposes unless you have explicitly given your consent.) If a site collects personal information but doesn't have a privacy policy, don't use that site.

● Where appropriate, seek advice from a qualified professional (such as a doctor, in the case of health advice) if you're thinking of taking action as a result of information you received from a website.

**For more information download a copy of Consumers International's report "Credibility on the web". Go to www.consumersinternational.org. You can print out more copies of this sheet. Both are available in French and Spanish.**