

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission n Bureau of Consumer Protection n Office of Consumer and Business

Problems With Holiday Purchases?

The holiday season means gifts and that means shopping. And with all that buying, maybe some of your purchases didn't work out exactly right. If a retailer didn't deliver as promised or if you feel you've been ripped off, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has some tips for you.

Know Your Rights

By law, retailers — including e-tailers — are required to ship an order within the time stated on their website (or in their ads) or at the time the order is placed. If a company doesn't promise a time, it must ship the order within 30 days after receiving it. And if the company is unable to ship within the promised time, it is required to say so and allow the consumer to agree to the delay or to cancel the order and receive a prompt refund.

Keep Good Records

Be sure and track your purchases. Keep printouts of the web pages where you placed your orders with details about the transaction, including your emails to the retailers and their responses to you, in case you're not satisfied.

Get Satisfaction

If you have an unsatisfactory shopping experience, the best course of action is to contact the retailer. Look for an address to write to or a phone number to call. If you've never heard of the seller, check on its location and reputation with the Better Business Bureau or the state attorney general's office.

If you're dissatisfied with the way the matter is handled, take your business elsewhere in the future. However, it is important to recognize that while some business practices — such as notifying the consumer that the order will be delayed in a less-timely manner than the consumer may like — may be poor customer service — they're not necessarily against the law.

File a Complaint

If you suspect the business may have broken the law, file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission. The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit www.ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357). The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.