

# Alvin's money savers

Check out money expert **Alvin Hall** – he's going to save you pounds every week

## ONLINE SHOPPING – KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Do you know your rights if you buy something online? There are lots of regulations about the way goods are sold in the UK and, on the whole, consumers get good protection. What you might not know is that if you buy something over the internet, you have more rights, not fewer.

But research carried out across Europe found that more than half the websites selling electronic gadgets were breaking laws designed to protect consumers.

It seems they either didn't know the rules or ignored them. So here's my guide to help you understand your rights and what the law says you can do:

**1** If you buy something online, you have more than a week in which to return it. It doesn't have to be damaged or faulty, you can send it back purely because

you've changed your mind or because when the goods arrived, they weren't what you expected. However, there are some exceptions. The seven-day cooling-off period doesn't apply if a) you bought something that was customised or made especially for you, b) you bought fresh food or c) it's something like a DVD or CD that you've taken out of its packaging.

**2** The seven-day cooling-off period starts the day after you receive the goods and lasts for seven working days (giving you a bit more than one week). You may be asked to pay for postage and packing if you send something back within the cooling-off period. That's not against the law. However, the company is supposed to tell you whether you or it will have to pay, otherwise they have to foot the bill.

**3** The procedure is different if you want to send something back because it's faulty or doesn't work. In that case, you should ask the retailer to arrange for it to be picked up or you should claim the cost of the postage back. It's worth knowing that if you buy something that goes wrong within the first six months, it's up to the company that sold it to you (not the manufacturer) to show that the fault wasn't there when you bought it, rather than you having to show that it was.

**4** The same rights relating to faulty goods apply whenever you shop, not only online, but also in the high street. You can't demand your money back, but you do have a right to ask for the gadget to be repaired or replaced and if that can't be done, you should be given a refund. If you're being fobbed off by a retailer (or online), tell them you'll get in touch with Consumer Direct, which is the government's consumer complaints body, which you can call on 08454 040506.

Get on the web like Brad and Angelina, but remember your rights when shopping online



## Q&A

My mum's got a cash ISA and she's read that she can put more money into it this year. She doesn't know what she's supposed to do. Can you help?

Laura, Hampshire

**ALVIN SAYS:** Anyone in the UK aged 16 or over can pay up to £3,600 a year into a cash ISA (Individual Savings Account), which is simply a tax-free savings account. Whether your mother can put extra money into her cash ISA will depend on how old she is.

If your mother's aged 50 or over by 5 April 2010 (which is the end of the tax year) she can top up her cash ISA to £5,100 anytime until 5 April 2010. If she won't be 50 until or after 6 April 2010, she'll have to wait until after the start of the new tax year to contribute the higher figure.

Any extra money she pays in must be with the same ISA provider. If your mother has taken out a cash ISA that pays a fixed rate of interest, she may have to top it up in one go.

Some other ISA providers aren't letting people top up cash ISAs that pay a fixed rate.

## BE A HI-TECH SAVER

**1** Use the camera on your mobile to photograph a piece of clothing or other item you're thinking about buying. Then go home and see if it really fits with what you already have. You may discover that it looks exactly like something you already own!

**2** Text yourself (instead of your BFF) a description of the item and the amount you paid for it immediately after making a purchase. Alternatively, download a nifty 'spendometer' from Moneybasics (spendometer.co.uk). It will keep track of your spending and it's free to download. Do this no matter how small the purchase. It could help you gain better control over your impulsive spending habits.

**3** Make your screensaver on your phone or personal computer a) the total amount of your outstanding credit card balance, b) the amount of your daily spending limit, or c) some other important financial number or goal. This way, your finances will never be out of sight or mind.

**4** Sign up at your bank to have account balance information, overdraft alerts, and other details sent to your mobile. These reminders may be just the thing you need to help you stay in control when the lure of retail therapy is overwhelming your reason.

**5** Check your credit card accounts online. Make sure you know how much you can afford to spend each month and still be able to pay off the bill in full. If you're close to that figure, stop spending. If you've gone over that amount, return any recent purchases and get back in the black.

**GOT A HOT MONEY-SAVING TIP? I'D LOVE TO HEAR IT!**

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Fearne Cotton makes the most of her phone – use yours to help manage your finances

# Team Reveal

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Each week in Reveal I'll be sharing my advice with you

I'm always interested in how people use technology (especially mobile phones) and the internet in their daily lives. Many of us use it to communicate more easily with loved ones and friends, or to get information about good deals on items they want. I used the internet this week to answer a reader's question about cash ISAs. Still, I wonder if people know what their rights are when they buy online? Or how technology can help them with their money? I explore these subjects this week. And you may be surprised to find out how your trusty mobile – as well as your computer – can help you.

*Alvin*

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