

## WHAT EVERY E-CONSUMER SHOULD KNOW

A prominent U.S. consumer advocacy group offers guidelines for Internet activity

The Consumer Reports Webwatch

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We believe Web sites will promote Web credibility if they adopt these basic policies:

### Identity:

- Web sites should clearly disclose the physical location where they are produced, including an address, a telephone number, or an e-mail address.
- Sites should clearly disclose their ownership, private or public, naming their parent company.
- Sites should clearly disclose their purpose and mission.

### Advertising and Sponsorships:

- Sites should clearly distinguish advertising from news and information, using labels or other visual means. This includes “in-house” advertising or cross-corporate ad sponsorships. Search engines, shopping tools, and portals should clearly disclose paid result-placement advertising, so consumers may distinguish between objective search results and paid ads.
- Sites should clearly disclose relevant business relationships, including sponsored links to other sites. For example, a site that directs a reader to another site to buy a book should clearly disclose any financial relationship between the two sites.
- Sites should identify sponsors. The site’s sponsorship policies should be clearly noted in accompanying text or on an “About Us” or “Site Center” page.

### Customer Service:

- Sites engaged in consumer transactions should clearly disclose relevant financial relationships with other sites, particularly when these relationships affect the cost to a consumer.
- Sites should clearly disclose all fees charged, including service, transaction and handling fees, and shipping

costs. This information should be disclosed before the ordering process begins.

- Sites should clearly state and enforce policies for returning unwanted items or canceling transactions or reservations.

### Corrections:

- Sites should diligently seek to correct false, misleading, or incorrect information.
- Sites should prominently display a page or section of the site where incorrect information is corrected or clarified.
- Sites should strive to mark content with its published date when failing to do so could mislead consumers.
- Sites should clearly state their policy on a consumer’s rights if a purchase is made based on incorrect information on the site.

### Privacy:

- Site privacy policies should be easy to find and clearly, simply stated.
- Sites should clearly disclose how personal data from site visitors and customers will be used. Personal data includes name, address, phone number, and credit card number.
- Sites should disclose whether they use browser-tracking mechanisms such as “cookies” and other technologies such as Web beacons, bugs, and robots.
- Sites should explain how data collected from them will be used.
- Sites should notify customers of changes to privacy policies and provide an easy opt-out alternative.