

Some simple tips for online shopping this festive season

Although internet penetration in sub-Saharan Africa is still far below the world average of around 30%, the numbers are increasing as Africans become more familiar and comfortable with online shopping. According to figures from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), in South Africa, 51% of individuals with internet access shop online and in Kenya, 18-24% make online purchases and according to a 2014 Phillips Consulting survey, Nigeria's online shopping sector grew from N68.4 billion in 2011 to N78 billion in 2012, representing a growth of 25%.



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Oliver Facey, VP Operations for DHL Express sub-Saharan Africa, says that shopping online not only offers consumers access to a greater selection of products with easy to compare prices, but also allows individuals to purchase products that may not yet be available in their own country.

He warns though that while there are many motivators of why to shop online, consumers must be aware of the do's and don'ts of online shopping to avoid possible drawbacks. Consumers should also be aware of the regulations involved with purchasing from international retailers, in order to avoid incurring additional expenses, thereby making the product less of an attractive buy.

Advice when buying from international e-retailers:

- **Be conscious of customs' import duties and taxes:** Consumers are often caught off-guard when their shipments arrive from international retailers with unexpected additional charges. It is therefore imperative for consumers to be aware that they may have to pay customs duty for their online purchases, depending on the country that they are buying the goods from.
- **Regulations/restrictions on certain products:** Some products are prohibited or have certain limitations when imported. These could be aviation restrictions - for example, flammable liquids are categorized as dangerous goods, therefore importing of perfume would be restricted. There may also be country specific restrictions - for example, on certain food or animal by-products.
- **Gifts are not necessarily exempted from duties and taxes:** When purchasing online products as a gift, check on the receiving country's regulations to avoid the recipient being held liable for additional charges. For example, Customs Bureaus in Angola have legislated tax-free exemptions for gifts to an individual as long as the value is less than USD 350. In Zimbabwe, the limit is USD 50. This shows the varying limits for exemptions and demonstrates the importance of checking local regulations prior to making your online purchases.
- **Check delivery options and costs:** Most websites offer a variety of delivery options, with associated costs. Make your decision by taking into account the cost of shipping, the expected transit times and the value of your order. For peace of mind, it is advisable to select a premium courier delivery option, where the delivery process can be tracked from dispatch to final delivery.
- **Use reputable e-retailer websites:** Be sure to only make online purchases from websites that are well-known and reputable. Do not be fooled by websites with offers that may look enticing - if it sounds too good to be true, it usually is.

"Online shopping is definitely the way to go, from a convenience and cost saving point of view, so once consumers become familiar with their local regulations, they can really reap the rewards. We have seen a steady increase over the past couple of weeks as consumers took advantage of the Black Friday and Cyber Monday deals available online.

"The build up to the festive season is always peak season for parcel shipments within the express industry, and this year is no different. We recognize and welcome the influx of volumes and our ongoing investment in our people and extensive infrastructure across Africa ensures that we are well positioned to continue to exceed our customers' service expectations," concludes Facey.

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