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FEATURE

Buying Vehicle Online

When a good deal isn't really real!

You can now buy a vehicle, sitting in the comfort of your living room- by tapping into the online marketplace. The tech-savvy consumers cannot thank digital technology enough which is fast transforming the business, and people's experience of buying and selling online.

Those selling the second hand vehicles use social network sites, especially Facebook pages, to market the vehicles using enticing languages to lure the buyers.

Some second- hand dealers also act as agents posting pictures of the vehicles on the social sites, promising to have the vehicles shipped from abroad once payments are received.

This new trend has made it easier for dishonest sellers to defraud consumers. There are a number of things you need to be aware of before going online to buy a vehicle.

The scammers put out advertisements for high-value items including cars that sometime don't exist. They siphon funds from victims to fuel their greed by creating false identities and fake websites in order to make the scheme more convincing.

In a typical scam, a legitimate buyer will be approached by a scammer selling a car usually priced well below market value. The scammer will offer to ship the car after money transfer. It is seen that once the money is transferred, contact is broken or sometimes additional funds are requested by the scammers to cover "unforeseen" events. In any case, the legitimate buyer never receives a car and loses his/her money.

Well, the onus is on the buyers to tread carefully. If the vehicle is being offered at a much cheaper price, it demands a thorough inspection.

Go by the Golden Rule, which is, never buy a car that you have not seen in real life. A vehicle history report may also be a good idea, though scammers have been known to use fake vehicle identification details.

Do a Google image search for the featured make and model to see if the exact same image pops up elsewhere. If it does, that should raise red flags about whether the image has been copied from another site

Just beware of sellers who want to conclude a transaction as quickly as possible. Scammers want to get your money before you have time to change your mind.

Buyers can also call the seller to establish phone contact. If seller seems to neglect details agreed to via e-mail or is unable to answer questions about their location or the location of the vehicle in question, it is likely to be a scam. If the number in the advertisement is disconnected, be wary. If the seller says it is disconnected because they are overseas, ask for a landline phone number at their current location, as well as a mobile phone number. If a street address is given then check on Google Street for the address.

Consumers shopping online, be it for a car or electronic goods, jewellery or cosmetic, the same rule applies. Always ensure that the link is secure before entering credit card details on a website. Check the website for the following:

- Look for a padlock symbol in the browser window frame, which appears when you attempt to log in or register.
- The web address should begin with 'https://'. The 's' stands for 'secure'.
- The address bar or the name of the site owner will turn green, if you are using the latest version of your browser.

Always remember: if a deal feels “fishy” or sounds too good to be true, then follow your instinct and exercise prudence!