



**HBC**

# Hoffman Brown Company

INSURANCE

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## SAFETY NOTES



### Online Shopping Safety

Online fraud can take many forms, from non-delivery of goods to non-acceptance of returned goods. In many cases, online fraud can be deterred by following a few simple practices. Just like consumers embrace measures to protect themselves in brick-and-mortar stores, online shoppers should consider sensible precautions as well.

**Learn as much as possible about the product and seller:** Shoppers will feel more secure and confident if they are familiar with the merchants from whom they are buying. The Internet offers the platform for retailers to provide information about their companies and histories while the buyers are empowered to do their research about the products and companies. Shoppers might also learn about a retailer from its reputation, from previous purchases, referrals from friends or reviews and comments by other shoppers found online at sites such as BizRate.com.



**Understand the retailers' refund policies:** Look for and ask about what the refund policies are. Questions to ask include: the required timeframe a buyer must contact the retailers and return the items, if a full refund will be offered or a merchandise credit, and if an item that has been opened can be returned. For retailers without refund policies, consumers can use buyer protection programs from either the site or through their payment method (i.e. credit card or online payment service). This ensures that if there is a problem with a transaction, the payment will be covered or refunded as a result of the protection guarantee.



**Choose a secure password to protect account information:** Many people use passwords for online stores that could be guessed, like their birthday, Social Security Number or a family member's name. Instead, a password should contain a combination of upper and lower case letters and numbers and symbols that no one else will know.



**Use a secure checkout and payment process:** Many Web sites use a technology called Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) to encrypt the personal and financial information sent over the Internet. To know if the retailer is offering a safe checkout process, look for the logos from companies like VeriSign or TrustE logo. A browser will also display the icon of a locked padlock at the bottom of the screen to indicate encryption. When it comes to choosing which method to use when paying online, consumers should take precautions when entering credit card or checking account information at each online retailer they visit. By entering this on several different merchant Web sites, the likelihood of this information being compromised increases. A safe and easy-to-use payment service (such as PayPal) allows shoppers to enter account information only once at a highly secure and reputable site that protects this financial information from merchants and other intruders. Future purchases should be made from that one account to avoid the need to enter credit card information separately into the Web sites of individual retailers.

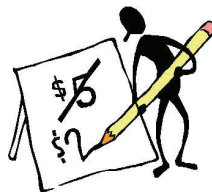


**VeriSign**



**Helpful Tip: If it sounds too good to be true...it probably is!**

As with any purchase, shoppers should read the fine print (or, in some instances, click the links describing the purchase agreement). While Internet shops frequently offer lower prices than brick-and-mortar stores, shoppers should be wary of unreasonably low bargain prices or unusually attractive promises.



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