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Canadians starting to feel more comfortable shopping online

July 21, 2004 (TIMMINS). After several years of uncertainty, Canadians are now starting to embrace e-commerce. “As internet-based shopping becomes more common, many small businesses are starting to realize that a commercial website can be a valuable marketing tool”, said Christy Marinig, Chair of NEOnet, the technology development organization for northeastern Ontario. “High-speed internet brings countless advantages to northern Ontario, including the ability to sell goods on-line and increase market reach”, added Marinig.

The most recent StatsCan results from 2002 found that 41% of internet users placed 16.6 million orders online, spending almost \$2.4 billion, or an average of \$145 per order. That’s an increase from a 2001 Ipsos-Reid survey, which found that Canadians spent \$860 million online. Internet users felt even more comfortable doing their banking online (57% of internet-using households did so in 2003, according to StatsCan).

There are still concerns about the safety of internet shopping and sales though. In fact, the Ipsos-Reid survey found that 83% of people who had never made an on-line purchase said their main concern was security. However, according to the RCMP, (http://www.rcmp.ca/scams/shop_e.htm) shopping on-line can be just as safe as shopping in your local grocery store, if you buy from a reputable business on a secure website. According to Internet Fraud Watch (<http://www.fraud.org/internet/intset.htm>) paying by credit card is the safest way to shop on-line, for two reasons: most scam artists don’t take credit cards, and consumers have the right to dispute questionable charges with their credit card company.

According to Marinig, these are valuable lessons for area merchants wanting to sell products over the web. “Customers obviously want to feel secure, so businesses need to make it obvious that their site is a safe, secure, and reliable place to do their shopping.”

NEOnet offers a few tips for business website developers that will reassure clients when they visit a company’s site:

- Display the company’s physical address and phone number.
- Make sure the site clearly explains shipping options, return policies, and warranties.
- Ensure that the webpage where clients enter personal information is secure.
- Never ask for or return credit card information by e-mail, as it is NOT secure.
- Develop a Privacy Policy that protects your clients’ information.
- Send a response to the client immediately after an order is placed, and stay in touch with the client in the event of shipping delays or backorders

“E-commerce may not be part of a good strategy for every business,” says Marinig, “but with the growing number of people shopping on-line, it’s certainly worth looking into.” For more information on how e-business can help companies become more competitive, visit the NEOnet website at www.neonet.on.ca.