by grace chen

SEVEN thousand six hundred and forty-one. That⿰s how many complaints the online shopping industry garnered at the National Consumer Complaints Centre (NCCC) in 2014.

This makes it the sector with the highest number of complaints in the 2014 NCCC annual consumer complaints report, said its legal and policy executive Daniel Yap.

Undelivered goods, damaged products and dubious quality make up the list of consumer grievances. Many have also fallen prey to scams.

Mandeep Singh, one of the centre⿰s legal executives, tells of customers who thought they were buying genuine designer brands but were delivered fake goods instead. The buyers only realised they had been cheated when attempts to contact the seller came to naught.

⿰These sellers don⿰t have a physical office. They can change their contact numbers the very next day,⿰ said Mandeep.

To avoid these pitfalls, he advised consumers to carry out their own due diligence before clicking on ⿰buy⿰. ⿰Know the product. If it⿰s too cheap, chances are high that the seller may not even have the product in hand to start with. Investigate the company. See if it⿰s legitimate. If you can go directly to the seller and inspect the product, even better. Meet at a place so you can check to see if the product is genuine and if it meets your expectations. Only then do you agree to the transaction,⿰ he said.

Cash-on-delivery is the best way consumers can safeguard themselves when it comes to online shopping, said centre legal and policy executive Shabana Naseer Ahmad.

⿰This is the best arrangement because the buyer would be able to see the goods before making payment,⿰ she said.

This agreement also saves customers from disappointment as sometimes, there is a risk that the real thing may not be what is advertised.

To protect Malaysian consumers, NCCC will be drafting a memorandum to the Government to amend outdated laws and to educate consumers on their rights in the e-commerce sphere.

Coming in second place after online shopping, is the general consumer products sector. Televisions, refrigerators and air conditioners fall in this category. Poor repair services make up a majority of complaints here. Taking third place is the telecommunications sector where billing disputes have been cited as the major cause of consumer discontent.

The National Consumer Complaints Centre is a non-profit organisation. You may reach them at 03-7877 9000.

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