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YOU'VE GOT GIFTS

Despite lingering privacy concerns, many consumers are enjoying the convenience of online shopping

By Marcus Hathcock
Oregon Daily Emerald

The sounds of holiday shopping usually include cash registers chiming and a department store Santa ho-ho-ho-ing — but now, they also include the click of a mouse.

The last few years' battle between online and in-person shopping continues in 2001 in a holiday season during an economic downturn. University students and an e-commerce expert said there are benefits and pitfalls to both methods of shopping.

"This (holiday season), e-commerce is just plain taking off," said Carla Meeske, an adjunct marketing instructor at the University. "Finally, businesses got their act together. Sites load fast, and checkout goes more smoothly."

Consumers can buy just about anything on the Internet these days, Meeske said, adding that the most popular items people buy online include books, toys, music, videos, electronics, clothing and shoes.

In order to win the hearts of die-hard mall shoppers, Meeske said online businesses should tailor their shopping procedures to mirror traditional in-store shopping as closely as possible.

"The Web site has to do a really good job describing what (the product) is and why you should buy it," Meeske said.

One Web site that has been successful in connecting people to the goods they want is the online auction site www.eBay.com, Meeske said. She said eBay is the sixth-most popular site on the World Wide Web, just ahead of the search engine www.google.com.

The reason eBay is so popular, Meeske said, is that anyone can find anything at the site — it's like "a giant flea market," Meeske said.

Freshman art major Kathleen



Peter Utsey Emerald

Sullivan said she sees eBay as more of a thrift store than a flea market.

"eBay seems kind of sketchy," Sullivan said. "The (products) are used, and you buy them from someone else, not a company."

Fear of spam

Sullivan's concerns regarding the security of transactions mirror those that have been a concern among online shoppers in the past. But, Meeske said, security has become less of an issue, and privacy concerns have become more prevalent.

"Overall, people are much less concerned this year (than they have been in past years)," Meeske said. "Now, businesses are the ones afraid. There's a huge rate of people using fraudulent cards online, and these businesses lose out."

Sophomore physics major Alex Lowe said although he hasn't ever bought anything online, he would

be willing to give it a try.

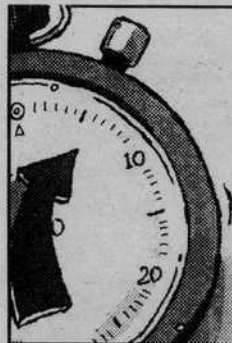
"I hear online shopping is just as safe — if not safer — than store shopping," Lowe said.

Meeske said common fears in Internet transactions involve lack of privacy, not security. She said some people have specific fears when giving out personal information while shopping online: They are apprehensive of physical harm from being tracked online, they may be worried about someone stealing their identity, or they may fear getting loads of "spam," or Internet junk mail.

"People are careful about giving out their information," Meeske said.

The federal anti-terrorism bill that passed last-month has given the government greater power to monitor citizens' Internet activities, Meeske said. Those expanded pow-

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