

Protecting yourself while shopping online

Almost anything can be purchased online — and many of us are doing just that. In fact, 95% of Americans have reported to shopping online at least yearly. The next time you buy online, follow these tips to protect yourself from falling victim to fraud or theft.

Market Data

Index	July	2025 YTD
DJIA	↑0.08%	↑3.73%
S&P 500	↑2.17%	↑7.78%
Nasdaq	↑3.70%	↑9.38%

All figures from C.O.B. 07/31/2025

1. Shop from secure websites only.

When you visit a website, the URL should begin with “https” instead of “http.” A secure website is encrypted, allowing you to complete a purchase and enter your personal and credit card information without being hacked.

2. Create a unique username and password for each account you have.

Most online retailers allow you to create an account on their website. This way your personal information and credit card number is stored in their system. Many users create an account to see their order status, order history and make reordering items easier. However, for each account you have, be sure to use a unique username and password. Think about this: if you have five accounts for five different retailers, but you use the same username/password for each, as soon as a hacker cracks your login, they now have access to every account in which you use that login for.

3. Never provide your social security number.

Plain and simple: online retailers do not need your social security number to complete a transaction.

4. Never use free Wi-Fi at public places when online shopping.

Hackers love free Wi-Fi because it’s easy for them to access your device and steal personal information. When using public Wi-Fi, your data is usually not encrypted. In addition, hackers can create fake Wi-Fi networks, and as soon as you connect to their password-free network, they have complete access to your device.

5. If a deal seems too good to be true, it likely is.

If you see an item on a website, such as Amazon, and the price has dropped by \$200, it’s likely a scam. Or, if you see an offer that says, “Like our Facebook page and we’ll give you a free iPhone!” it’s almost always a con.

6. Choose a credit card over debit card.

Use a credit card for online purchases as they typically offer better fraud protection and dispute resolution.

7. Monitor your credit card activity and statements.

Be proactive. Check your credit card activity every day and review your statements in-depth. Request to receive alerts for total purchases over a certain amount, such as \$500, within a billing period.

8. Don’t save payment information.

Avoid saving your credit card details on shopping websites unless it’s a reputable platform with strong security measures.

Sources: BigCommerce.com, Javelin Strategy & Research report, Mashable.com, <https://www.integrityinsurance.com>



Did You Know?

The student loan delinquency rate has hit 31%, with 5.8 million people at least 90 days past due on their payments...the highest rate since TransUnion began collecting data in 2012.

Source: Bloomberg, June 24, 2025

U.S. universities are seeing a roughly 10% decline in international graduate enrollment, including master's and doctoral students, which could slash around \$3 billion in tuition revenue this year.

Source: Financial Times, July 8, 2025

According to a brand-new Gallup poll, only 58% of Americans say they're "extremely" or "very" proud to be American – a record low since they started tracking in 2001. For Democrats, that number drops to just 36%, while Republicans remain high at 92%. Even Gen Z is less than half as patriotic as previous generations. Whether any of this is concerning or just a sign of changing times... I suppose that's up for debate.

Source: Gallup, June 30, 2025

While it may be a surprise, the vast majority of American flags sold in the U.S. are made in other countries. Roughly 6% of flags purchased in the U.S. are made domestically, while 94% are imported...primarily from China.

Source: Thomas Net, May 2, 2025

Thanks to auto-enrollment, default escalation, and simplified plan designs, American workers are saving more than ever. According to Vanguard's latest report, the average total savings rate in employer retirement plans has hit an all-time high of 11.7%, proving that smart plan design does, in fact, drive better long-term outcomes for retirement readiness. *Source: NAPA, June 24, 2025*

"The world is changed by your example, not your opinion."

~ Paulo Coelho

Happy News Corner

29-Year-Old Woman's Friendship with 97-Year-Old Woman Began with a Ride and Wendy's Meal.

In June, 29-year-old Miami, Florida resident Estrella Quiroz was driving to pick up lunch when she noticed an elderly woman walking slowly down the street and decided to approach her to see if she needed assistance. That woman turned out to be Lilian, a 97-year-old retiree. The pair became fast friends.

"I'm driving and I saw this really old lady, like, walking across the street," Quiroz says at the start of her video posted to both Instagram and TikTok. "She was so slow and she had a little walker. I looped back around to see if I can find her."

Quiroz drives around searching for the woman, then spots the retiree waiting at a bus stop. She offers her a ride, and Lilian cautiously accepts her offer.

Lilian asks why she's helping her for free and Quiroz says she reminds her of her "abuelita." Chatting, the pair learn more about each other, which includes a lovely coincidence: Lilian was born in Leon, Nicaragua and so was Quiroz's dad.

Then, after Quiroz offers to buy her lunch at Wendy's, Lilian says she used to be an accountant but now lives alone on government assistance. Quiroz and her new honorary grandmother finally eat lunch together outside of Lilian's home, where they cement their bond.



"I'm so grateful for our friendship," Lilian says in Spanish. "May God bless us and make us friends."

Quiroz says this act of care didn't require any cash — just time — which made the energy shift in the person.

"I think sometimes it's so easy to see people as almost not human ... life is already so hard for them," Quiroz says. "So, sometimes we don't even need to buy anything. Words can be so powerful in itself." *Source: Joseph Lamour, Today.com*

First Trust Economics Blog– Q2 Rebound

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07/28/2025

President Trump announced higher tariffs were on the way almost as soon as he took office. As a result, businesses focused on buying foreign goods in advance, to front run those tariffs, putting some of their purchases from domestic producers on the backburner. The result was a massive surge in imports in Q1 that made trade the largest drag on real GDP growth for any quarter since at least the 1940s.

Now trade has gone in reverse, with purchases shifted back to US producers, which means trade will make a large contribution to real GDP in Q2 and real GDP will rebound sharply. How much it will rebound will be unclear until Tuesday morning, when we get a report on June trade and inventories, which could lead to substantial revisions in our forecast.

In the meantime, we are forecasting 3.0% annualized growth in Q2 versus a consensus expected 2.4%. But don't get too excited if we're right. Real GDP has averaged 2.0% per year the past twenty years, so one quarter with 3.0% growth after a quarter of -0.5% is not a sign of an economic boom.

Consumption: Auto sales declined at an 8.6% annual rate in Q2 while “real” (inflation-adjusted) retail sales excluding autos rose at a 1.0% rate and real service spending appears up at a 1.0% pace. This brings our estimate of real consumer spending on goods and services, combined, to a 0.5% rate, adding 0.3 points to the real GDP growth rate (0.5 times the consumption share of GDP, which is 68%, equals 0.3).

Business Investment: We estimate a 2.1% growth rate for business investment, with gains in equipment and intellectual property leading the way. A 2.1% growth rate would add 0.3 points to real GDP growth. (2.1 times the 14% business investment share of GDP equals 0.3).

Home Building: Residential construction declined at about a 5.0% rate in the second quarter, possibly reflecting a lack of workers to build homes while strict immigration enforcement makes more units available for rent. A 5.0% annualized decline would be a 0.2 point drag on real GDP growth. (-5.0 times the 4% residential construction share of GDP equals -0.2).

Government: DOGE and other Trump Administration efforts are cutting back on federal payrolls and transfers to NGOs, but only direct government purchases (not government salaries or transfer payments) count when calculating GDP. We estimate these purchases were up at a 1.2% rate in Q2, which would add 0.2 points to the GDP growth rate (1.2 times the 17% government purchase share of GDP equals 0.2).

Trade: The trade deficit plummeted in Q2 as businesses stopped front-running tariffs. This forecast may change a great amount when the “advance” report on trade arrives the morning of Tuesday July 29, but for now we're projecting net exports will increase the Q2 real GDP growth rate by 3.4 percentage points.

Inventories: After an import-related surge in Q1, inventories should grow much more slowly in Q2, generating what we are estimating as a 1.0 percentage point drag on real GDP growth.

Add it all up, and we get a 3.0% annual real GDP growth rate for the second quarter, a sharp rebound from the decline in Q1, but not a sign of an economic boom.

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