

Business Technology Program

How-To Guide: How to Protect Yourself When Buying Technology

For most business owners, buying business related technology is a stressful endeavor. Spend too little or go too low tech and you'll find yourself needing to upgrade almost immediately. Spend too much or go too high tech and inevitably the manufacturer will come out with a new version or the technology is so complicated you'll need to hire someone who understands it. Make sure you protect yourself from unforeseen hassles by following a few preemptive steps.

1. **Research professional and consumer reviews.** The best way to get a feel for the product's pros and cons is to consult the experts and reviews from other entrepreneurs like yourself who've bought the product. Here are some popular reviewer sites to visit before you make a purchase:

- [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)
- [ConsumerReports.org](https://www.consumerreports.org)
- [ConsumerSearch](https://www.consumersearch.com)
- [Cnet.com](https://www.cnet.com)
- [Epinions.com](https://www.epinions.com)
- [PC Magazine Reviews](https://www.pcmag.com)
- [ZDNet Reviews](https://www.zdnet.com)

Use good judgment when reading reviews. Do the person's critiques pertain to your business or your use of the product? Anytime you see the word "slow" or "complicated" or "bad support" – beware. You don't want to spend valuable time you could be selling dealing with tech issues.

2. **Shop around for the best price.** Sometimes it pays to buy directly from the manufacturer. Other times you can get a better price from a reseller. To start, do an Internet search on the product name and see what pops up. Each of the big search engines (Bing, Google and Yahoo) offers a shopping tool where you can compare prices, see reviews of stores and see if the product is sold at a store nearby (to avoid shipping costs). Here are some popular technology reseller sites:

- [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)
- [Best Buy](https://www.bestbuy.com)
- [Buy.com](https://www.buy.com)
- [Cisco.com](https://www.cisco.com)
- [Ebay.com](https://www.ebay.com)
- [Microsoft.com](https://www.microsoft.com)
- [Overstock.com](https://www.overstock.com)

Don't forget to check the manufacturer's site as well. You never know when the manufacturer is offering the best deal or has a special service deal.



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3. **Talk to contacts and colleagues.** Ask business associates, friends who are tech experts, or even tech-savvy employees for their opinions on what to buy. You can ask colleagues on social networks like Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter and see what kinds of responses you get. You may also want to post your questions on open forums such as Ask.com or Yahoo! Answers to see if anyone has used the product.
4. **Check references.** If you're doing business with a new technology provider that you'll have an ongoing relationship with—for instance, if you're choosing a Web design firm--always ask the company for references. Contact the references to ask how satisfied they were with the company's work, how problems were handled and what, if any, complaints they had. You can also search local sites such as Yelp.com or Angie's List to see what other business owners have to say about the company. Last, but not least, contact the local Chamber of Commerce and Better Business Bureau to see if there are any complaints against the company.
5. **Read the fine print.** Whether you're buying a product or a service, be sure you know exactly what the purchase price covers. Ask about customer support, updates, warranties and (if you are buying a service) any penalties for early cancellation.
 - a. What kind of customer support is included?
 - b. Are updates included and what is the price?
 - c. If you're purchasing equipment, is there a warranty for replacement?
 - d. If you're purchasing a service, is there a penalty for early cancellation?
6. **Get advice.** If you have any concerns when purchasing software, hardware or equipment, talk to a trusted IT advisor. Explain how you plan to use the product or service and get advice on what you do and don't need. Here are some topics to cover:
 - Memory/storage issues: How much and is it expandable?
 - Speed: Is it fast enough?
 - Compatibility: Is it compatible with your other technology?
 - Expandability: When you're ready to expand, how easy it is to add on?
 - Updates: When is new technology coming out? Should you wait?
 - Security issues: What kind of security is in place to protect your information?
 - Transferring data: How easy is it to transfer data from your old system to your new one?
 - User-friendliness: How easy to use is the interface?

