

Click and check out: just two simple steps for the perfect gift

Teens attracted to convenience and flexibility of online shopping purchase products on Web

by **Christine Chang**

Victoria's Secret usually doesn't have swimsuits in stock during the chilly weeks of February. Instead, most shoppers wander into the merry world of pink expecting to see racks of thick sweaters and winter apparel. But when senior Shreya Pramanick dropped by for a visit, she easily found a Victoria's Secret swimsuit that matched her personal taste. With the click of a button, Pramanick bought the exclusive summer accessory from the comfort of her home.

Online shopping is a trend that has become increasingly popular over the years, especially among young generations. According to Forrester Research, Cambridge, Mass., today's young adults, dubbed "Generation Y," spend about \$1.5 billion online per year. With easy access to many popular companies from their Internet browser, people are taking advantage of technology's conveniences through consumerism.

Pramanick's first online shopping experiences began near the end of her junior year, when she was given her own debit card. Though her dad pays for the bills, Pramanick uses the card to buy many of her own belongings, such as makeup, from various sites. She checks up regularly on certain apparel company sites, such as Old Navy, Forever 21, Gap, and Victoria's Secret, and subscribes to their discount emails as well.

"Shopping online is really convenient when I'm at home or being lazy, but it's still different from going to a mall where you can try stuff on," Pramanick said.

Nevertheless, she still does about half of her shopping through Web sites.

While Pramanick is a fan of buying apparel, junior Brandon Nguyen views online shopping with a different perspective. He is a collectibles enthusiast, and scours Web sites such as amazon.com for eccentric items that most people don't own.

"A lot of the things that I buy don't have any real purpose, but they're unique and hard to find in regular stores," Nguyen said. "Sometimes it's just stuff that I can show off to my friends and say, 'Hey guys, look what I've got.'"

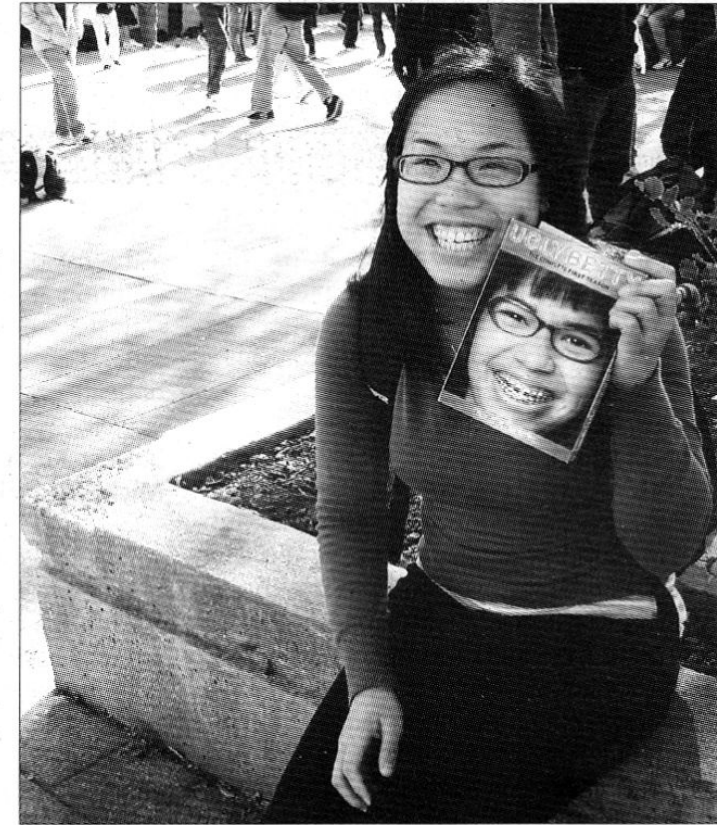
Nguyen confesses to being a whimsical buyer. When he was interested in weaponry, he bought a long stainless steel sword for decoration purposes. When he became curious about divination, he bought tarot cards, which are said to predict the future events. And when he found reason to own and appreciate some jewelry, Nguyen bought a pair of rings that could be rotated within each other.

Though most people view online shopping as a convenient means of buying, there are risks. Wrong sizes, quality dissatisfaction, and shipping overpricing can affect Internet buying experiences. Unable to see products in tangible form before purchase, customers are more prone to buying something that turns out to be a disappointment. When senior Kristie Woo received her order of a pair of new shoes, she was dismayed to find them a size too small. Though they were refundable, the round-trip shipping fee cut the refund payment short of full compensation.

Thus, most of the things Woo purchases online are objective products like curricular books and DVDs. A fan of entertainment media, she has bought newly released movies and past TV series for birthday occasions, Christmas gifts, and herself.

"The good thing about online shopping is that there are more people out there trying to sell the same product, and they're more competitive, so a lot of times you can buy things at a cheaper price than in stores," Woo said.

Nonetheless, Woo still pays extremely careful attention to the tag prices and shipping costs of items she purchases. She wants to steer clear of fraudulent deals. The American Bar Association, an organization that promotes legal justice, strongly recommends online shoppers do some research on the site they are buying from to ensure that it is both reliable and authentic.



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BET ON IT Senior Kristie Woo, who bears an uncanny resemblance to "Ugly Betty's" America Ferrara, bought season one of "Ugly Betty" on the internet.

While efficiency and great bargains are favorable aspects of shopping on the Internet, each customer's personal satisfaction cannot be guaranteed. Having picked out many of her clothes online, Pramanick considers herself fortunate for always getting a package that she is happy with.

"I usually just hope I get lucky, and it's a good thing I have been so far," Pramanick said.