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## BRITONS TAKE CAVALIER ATTITUDE TO RISKS OF INTERNET SHOPPING

- Over two-thirds (72 per cent) of British consumers acknowledge there are risks involved in having personal and financial information stored by websites but believe that these are not great enough to outweigh the benefits
- 73 per cent often feel they do not fully understand the risk of submitting personal data to websites
- 64 per cent find it useful to have credit card and other personal details stored by websites to save retyping on the next visit to the site
- Most people (59 per cent) are not aware that when clicking on a link in an email, the sender may be able to match their email address to their progress on the website
- Persistent adverts which block text, pop-ups and elaborate graphics which delay downloads are the biggest pet hates when using business websites

British consumers are happy to put their personal and financial information at risk if it means saving time on the internet, according to a new survey by **The Aziz Corporation**, the UK's leading independent executive communications consultancy. The research shows that 72 per cent acknowledge that there are risks involved with having personal information stored by websites, but believe that these are not great enough to outweigh the benefits of having their details and preferences ready to be quickly retrieved on websites they often use.

However 73 per cent feel they do not fully understand those risks, and 64 per cent make use of the option to have their credit card and other personal details remembered to save time in future.

This research comes in the wake of the TK Maxx incident in which hackers stole information from over 45 million payment cards used by the retailer's customers. It's believed the data was kept by the company for marketing purposes, to generate sophisticated customer profiling, a process common to most retailers. The fact that the fraud occurred over a 16 month period highlights just how susceptible consumers are to this 'invisible crime'.

Professor **Khalid Aziz**, Chairman of The Aziz Corporation, commented: "It is important people are not afraid to question technology and what their personal information could potentially be used for. The caricature of Little Britain's Carol Beer, "Computer says no", is all too reminiscent of the fact that people defer to technology rather than using their common sense. You wouldn't communicate your most personal financial information to a stranger on the street and yet this is effectively what can happen on websites."

Professor **Khalid Aziz**, continued: "Businesses and consumers alike need to think about responsible communication. There is a craze towards amassing huge amounts of data on individuals but this could potentially lead to marketing madness. Companies cannot afford to lose face by being careless with such valuable information and consumers must be aware of the potential dangers and how to avoid them. Otherwise you expose yourself to all kinds of risk and there may not always be someone there to bail you out."

The survey also reveals ignorance as to how websites work to track users, either for marketing purposes or more sinister objectives, such as phishing fraud. 59 per cent are unaware that when you click to allow images to be downloaded in an email, the sender can be alerted to the fact that you have opened the email – or that when you click on a link provided in an email, the sender may be able to match your individual email address against your progress on the website. However, a majority (53 per cent) state that they were concerned once informed of this.

Professor **Khalid Aziz**, said:

“This key lack of understanding about how websites and emails can be manipulated is worrying, particularly given that businesses today take these forms of communication for granted. Indeed, if banks and retailers, some of the largest organisations in the world, can’t keep on top of internet fraud what chance does Joe Bloggs on the street have?”

**Feel like Big Brother is watching you when you’re on the internet...well he probably is....**

The survey also revealed a certain healthy paranoia amongst respondents, with 72 per cent claiming they feel like ‘Big Brother’ is watching them if people track their progress on their websites. A similar proportion (73 per cent) of respondents stated that it was an invasion of their privacy to have information about what they looked at on websites recorded. The greatest concern is over information being passed to third parties, which 81 per cent consider completely unacceptable. ”

**Taking the necessary precautions?** While 90 per cent of home PC users believe they have up-to-date anti-virus software, when asked about anti-spyware software, of increasing importance in the battle against internet fraud, a third (33 per cent) either do not have it or do not know.

**Websites: the things we love to hate** The research also identified peoples’ attitudes to business websites and their pet hates. Persistent adverts which follow you down the page or block text are considered very annoying by 88 per cent of internet users, followed by pop-ups (81 per cent), delayed downloads caused by large images or elaborate graphics (74 per cent) and long flash-supported introductions (68 per cent). In terms of what was deemed essential for a business website, general company information is considered very important by 74 per cent. However, it was succinct, plain-English, which came out as on top with all respondents stating this was important when logging onto a business website.

Professor **Khalid Aziz**, concluded: “Despite all the advances in modern technology, good old-fashioned plain-English comes out as the favourite amongst those using business websites. The biggest gripe relates to elaborate graphics due to delaying download times. This is indicative of our time pressured culture. In such an environment, communicating your message clearly and concisely is most important of all.”

- Ends -

Professor **Khalid Aziz** of The Aziz Corporation is available for interview on this story. If you would be interested in speaking with Khalid then please visit our Contact us page.

Notes to Editors

**The Aziz Corporation**

The Aziz Corporation is the UK’s leading independent executive communications consultancy.



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Its mission is to add value to businesses by ensuring their people are effective communicators. Consultancy services offered by the Aziz Corporation include presentation skills, media training, crisis management, image consultancy and voice development.

About the survey

This survey was completed by 200 senior managers and directors of major companies based across the United Kingdom.