



OFFICE OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

Consumer Quarterly

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Spotlight on Consumer Information

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Consumer Connection

In today's marketplace, consumers have to continuously learn and adapt so they can make smart choices about new products and services. The Internet can be of great help, but it is easy for less experienced users to feel overwhelmed when a simple question leads to thousands of possible information sources of varying usefulness and credibility.

This issue of *Consumer Quarterly* spotlights the Office of Consumer Affairs' Consumer Connection Web site (<http://consumerconnection.ic.gc.ca>), which provides both easily accessible information to help consumers protect themselves in the marketplace and in-depth information for those researching consumer issues.

Consumer Connection's tools range from a calculator that figures out the impact of service fees on your mutual fund returns, to the *Canadian Consumer Handbook*, to a quick and clever quiz that determines your likelihood of falling victim to fraud. As one visitor to the site said, "It's a gold mine.... I took five minutes to use this site, and I will shortly be saving almost \$200 a year."

The site also contains, or has links to, a large body of Canadian research from consumer organizations, academics and government. Recent papers deal with the cost of credit, consumer protection in the investment field, biotechnology, consumer fraud, the role of voluntary codes in consumer protection, and much more.

Whatever the topic, the information on Consumer Connection is designed to:

- be easy to access and use
- save consumers time and money, and help them avoid mistakes
- present often complex information in a simple, easy-to-understand form
- provide seamless links to other consumer and government sites, and additional sources of information.

The numbers indicate that this approach is a hit with Canadian consumers. From mid-May to mid-June 2000, Consumer Connection received roughly 30 000 visits. All together, users clicked on more than 110 000 site pages during the month, and these numbers continue to grow.

Only a Click Away!

The Canadian Consumer Information Gateway (<http://ConsumerInformation.ca>) is an on-line portal that gives one-stop access to comprehensive consumer information compiled by more than 25 federal departments and agencies. The Gateway is a Service Canada initiative, developed by the Office of Consumer Affairs and Public Works and Government Services Canada with the support of Treasury Board Secretariat. To find out more, turn to page 4.



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Consumer Quarterly is also available on Consumer Connection, the Office of Consumer Affairs' home page on *Strategis*, Industry Canada's business information Web site:

English
<http://consumerconnection.ic.gc.ca>

French
<http://carrefourdesconsommateurs.ic.gc.ca>

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Welcome to "Privacytown" ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Canadian consumers often face difficult and complex privacy issues pertaining to personal and financial information, credit ratings, the Internet, health care, the use of social insurance numbers, and the unauthorized collection and sale of consumer data, among other things.

Visitors to Privacytown, just launched on Consumer Connection, will be able to take a privacy tour — to the drug store, medical office, shopping mall, bank, grocery store, government offices and more. At each spot, consumers can learn when privacy issues might arise, how best to deal with them, and what their privacy rights and

At each spot, consumers can learn when privacy issues might arise, how best to deal with them, and what their privacy rights and remedies are.

remedies are. Privacytown features information on important related issues, such as how to safeguard against identity theft and how personal information flows in the knowledge-based economy, as well as links to other important sources, such as the federal and provincial privacy commissioners.

Canadian Consumer Information Gateway

Information that Matters from a Single, Trusted Source

The Canadian Consumer Information Gateway complements Consumer Connection. Developed by the Office of Consumer Affairs and Public Works and Government Services Canada with the support of Treasury Board Secretariat and Service Canada, the Gateway is a central source of consumer information compiled by more than 25 federal departments and agencies. The site organizes extensive consumer research under familiar topic headings, including environment, housing, food and money. The information is available in both English and French.

Launched by Industry Minister John Manley on June 22, the Gateway provides not only consumer information but also helps users find the contacts within the federal government

they need. The site is navigable by topic or with the help of a powerful search engine. Related Web links, e-mail addresses and regional phone numbers are provided throughout. All contributing partners regularly update their content to ensure it is current, and the Gateway's information base will expand as new partners come on board.

The portal is designed to help the federal government and its partner organizations provide credible consumer information to all Canadians. The Gateway is specifically designed to reduce the difficulty of finding the right federal source of information. It also helps those who don't have Internet access because government telephone enquiry officers can use the Gateway to quickly direct callers to the proper source of information.

The Gateway's address is <http://ConsumerInformation.ca>