

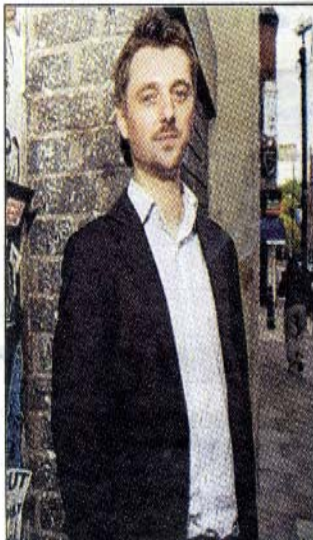
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Online checkouts scare buyers



SECURE: Online trader Stuart Williams

WITH more money than ever spent online - internet retail sales soared by nearly 40 per cent to £46.5 billion in the first half of the year - having a secure online presence is increasingly important for small businesses.

But consumer fears about the security of smaller companies' websites, combined with the failure of many firms to protect themselves against fraud, could be holding businesses back.

Research from online payments service PayPoint.net reveals that just three per cent of online shoppers trust small online businesses with their money, while more than 80 per cent are 'suspicious'

By **HELEN LOVELESS**

of the security of small, unknown companies.

Alessandro Hatami, managing director of PayPoint, says: 'Small online businesses have an even greater interest in ensuring their customers have the safest possible experience on their website than larger firms.'

'The safer customers feel, the more likely they are to visit again.'

Stuart Williams runs clubtix.co.uk, an online ticket business for club nights in the UK and Ibiza, based in Shoreditch, east

London. He took steps to improve security on his site after setting up a payment facility in early 2007 and seeing fraud levels rise sharply.

Stuart, 35, signed up for a secure online payments programme in which customers go through two levels of checks when they buy, reducing the likelihood of fraud and removing liability for fraud from the seller.

'The perception that smaller companies are riskier to do business with is a problem. We realise the need to reassure customers that shopping with us is safe,' says Stuart.

enterprise@financialmail.co.uk thisismoney.co.uk/smallbusiness