

Library system offers free access to Consumer Reports

By Jill Fuller

When I'm buying something new, whether it's a bike helmet or a laptop, I always check the reviews. Advertisers will tell me anything to get me to buy their product, but I want to hear from people who have actually used it. I also like to go to the store to compare options, prices, and quality.

But, things are different now. Many stores are still closed and for those that are open, I'm making my shopping trips a lot quicker these days as I try to limit my time out of my home. However, we all still want to make quality purchasing decisions, even during these unusual circumstances. The good news is that you can use Consumer Reports for free with your library card to help you find the product you want.

If your washing machine called it quits or you're dreaming about a new grill for when you can get the family back together, you can get accurate reviews, compare it to other brands and models, and determine the best quality and right fit for you ... while staying home!

According to their website, Consumer Reports "is an independent, nonprofit member organization that

works side by side with consumers for truth, transparency, and fairness in the marketplace."

Through research and testing, Consumer Reports offers fair and balanced reviews of products and models to help consumers make the best decisions about their purchases. The range of products they test and review is extensive and includes dishwashers, laptops, TVs, grills, cribs, sunscreens, mattresses, cars, refrigerators, hearing aids, and much more. Ordinarily, you have to purchase an annual membership to use Consumer Reports, but with your library card, you get access for free.

In each product review, Consumer Reports provides a Ratings Scorecard. The scorecard rates a variety of features they've tested, which varies depending on the product. For example, laptops are given ratings for Portability, Reliability, Display, Performance, and more. The reviews also include an overall rating, a summary review and detailed descriptions of the test, specifications and features of each product, and



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estimated prices.

You can use Consumer Reports with your library card and get all of these ratings for free. Go to www.bridgeslibrarysystem.org/databases, find "Consumer Reports" on the list of resources, and click "Use at Home." After entering your library card number, you'll be ready to start shopping! Bookmark the link on your computer so you can use it again and again.

The help from your library doesn't stop there. You can also read every issue of Consumer Reports and Consumer Reports on Health magazines online on Flipster. Just type www.bridgeslibrarysystem.org/magazines into your Internet browser on your computer or download the free Flipster app to read them, as well as over 90 other magazines.

Armed with quality information, you'll feel confident about your next purchase, even if you can't compare products in the shops or test them out in person. Your library card is your Shop Smart card when you use Consumer Reports!

(Jill Fuller is the coordinator of marketing and communications for the Bridges Library System.)