The Geography of My Stuff
Lesson 4: Virtual stuff

TEACHER NOTES

STARTER
Non-commercial sharing – virtual communities
To start, students can discuss their experiences of 'life online'. Which of them are members of the MySpace or FaceBook community? What are their experiences? Why have some chosen not to join in with such activities?

MAIN
What is the history of on-line purchasing?
A PowerPoint file provides students with facts about the growth in on-line purchasing in recent years. Key top this are new players such as are Amazon, alongside major existing retailers such as Argos and Curry's. Mention could also be made of easyJet and of second-hand retailing on e-bay. What factors explain all of this growth? (As well as obvious benefits that it brings people - such as speed, cost and convenience - students must think about the actual technical and economic changes that have allowed these benefits to be realised – e.g. the growth in (i) PC technology, (ii) broadband and (iii) credit card access).

Online issues (1) Mail-order shopping
 The impact on downloading on music and DVD retailers (including rental shops) is well-documented and the decline is on-going. Meanwhile, companies such as Amazon have an increasing presence in the 'real' world through their distribution centres. What is the net impact on the environment of these changes? Students should brainstorm this issue. The activity can end with a brief discussion whether CDs, DVDs and books have a future.

Online issues (2) Downloading: legal or illegal?
Many students may have never experienced purchasing CDs and may instead rely entirely on downloading. They should be aware of the relatively recent nature of this phenomenon and be aware of the debate that exists over payment for downloads and file sharing. The resources and links support this activity.

PLENARY

What kinds of crime exist online?
Without shops, there can be no shoplifting. But online consumption brings all kinds of new risks, from credit card fraud to the exploitation of young people in chat rooms by older people in disguise (not to mention exposure to upsetting ideas and images). This final session provides teachers with a good opportunity to debate these important issues with children and to discuss strategies for protection (this can be co-ordinated with citizenship teaching).