

Telemarketing **FRAUD** ...It's a Crime

THE FACTS: MAGAZINE SALES

Con artists use a variety of telemarketing approaches to rip you off over the telephone. Telemarketing fraud is a multi-million dollar business in Georgia. Every year thousands of Georgians lose money to telephone con artists. Victims lose from a few dollars to thousands. Some consumers lose their life savings and financial security.

Before you buy a magazine subscription from anyone over the phone, do your homework. These companies are hard to check out because they operate across state lines. You could ask the Better Business Bureau about any company you're not familiar with. However, you will need to contact the BBB in the state where the company is located, and some BBBs charge you for the call. If you can't afford to pay for this call, the BBB will not charge you, but you must tell the BBB you can't afford it. BBBs do maintain files about any companies they've received complaints about, even if the company is not a BBB member.

Scam artists often call consumers under the guise of selling magazine subscriptions, often as part of a sweepstakes "prize." However, their real goal is to get your credit card number and expiration date, and to use this information to run up thousands of dollars of unauthorized charges. Many times, you never receive the magazines you thought you had signed up for either.

The scam artist gets your name, phone number, and other personal information from a broker list. He will tell you that you have been chosen to participate in a contest for a cash prize because you are a preferred Visa or MasterCard customer, and that all you have to do to enter is buy some magazine subscriptions at "low introductory rates."

Do not give out your credit card number or expiration date! If you give out this information, your account could end up with thousands of dollars in unauthorized charges. Remember, prizes are free. If you have to buy something, it is not a prize.

Unscrupulous telemarketers also offer magazine subscriptions for "discount rates" that can be more expensive than buying the magazine at the store. Do the math yourself to see if the offer really is a good deal. You can get a low introductory subscription rate for most magazines by filling out an insert card from the magazine and sending in the subscription request yourself. In addition, magazine sales by telephone often result in long-term subscriptions with negative option renewals: unless you contact the publishing company to say, "Do not renew my subscription," the company will continue to renew your subscription and charge your credit card.

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Hang up when

- The telemarketer asks you for your credit card information. If he can't send you something in writing, just hang up.
 - The telemarketer threatens you with civil action if you question a charge on your credit card account.
 - The telemarketer wants you to act right away. If the offer is only good for today, just hang up.
 - The caller gets hostile when you ask specific questions. Don't let a stranger browbeat you into parting with your hard-earned money.
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- The caller urges you not to tell anyone about this opportunity. This ploy is frequently used to target the elderly. Con artists know that older people are more likely to be embarrassed about losing their money in a scam, and less likely to tell others about their losses.

You might feel more comfortable paying by credit card because you usually have some way to challenge the charge within a given time period. However, experienced scam artists also know how to get around this rule, so you're not as safe as you think.

File a complaint with the Governor's Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA) if you have been victimized in a magazine sales scheme. Describe what happened with as much detail as possible in a letter to OCA. Include copies of any documents that support your complaint. (Do not send originals!) Send your complaint to

The Governor's Office of Consumer Affairs
2 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive
Suite 356, East Tower
Atlanta, Georgia 30334.

You will receive confirmation from OCA that they have received your complaint. OCA will assign it to an investigator or forward to the appropriate agency. If you have any questions about filing a complaint, call OCA at 1-800-869-1123 (404-651-8600 in metropolitan Atlanta).

Written by Linda Dodson, Extension Consumer Economics Assistant, Department of Housing and Consumer Economics, University of Georgia College of Family and Consumer Sciences in cooperation with the Georgia Governor's Office of Consumer Affairs

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Gale A. Buchanan, Dean and Director