

## **Be wary of questionable job offers**

During hard times, questionable job offers may appeal to people who are out of work and desperate.

Some ads dangle an appealing job in front of you, get you hooked, and then ask you for money.

These ads rarely lead to employment and could result in the loss of your life savings at a hotel seminar where you've been told you will learn to make money.

Put a resume on line, and you may be hired by scammers who send you a fake check, ask you to wire some of the money somewhere else, and leave you to pay when the check bounces. Or they hire you to mail things they have ordered with stolen credit cards and your address.

The common denominator of most questionable job offers is that originators are out of state or operating out of a local hotel conference room.

Be wary of jobs that sound too good to be true, ask you for money, revolve around a check from strangers, and originate out of state.

Classified ads in newspapers and magazines that promise glamorous jobs are very common. Unfortunately, the ads rarely lead to employment.

Many of the advertisements that describe fabulous job opportunities are placed by swindlers interested only in making money. Suspicious job offers usually require people to send money in advance or provide a credit card number in order to get information, instead of receiving a fee after a person is hired.

Help wanted ads that appear to promote actual jobs or offer information on position openings when no jobs exist are deceptive and illegal under Wisconsin law. Employment ads must also disclose any purchase or investment that's required.

### **Complaints and inquiries about deceptive job ads include:**

**Postal Jobs:** Ads claim postal jobs are available paying \$23,700 a year, plus benefits. Interested persons are told to send a fee (often around \$39.95) for a packet of information. They later learn that the local post office is not hiring workers or accepting postal exams. Sometimes you receive the same postal application that can be obtained free of charge from the postal service.

**Work-At-Home Jobs:** Many offers claim you can make hundreds of dollars a week by working out of the comfort of your own home. One Wisconsin woman responded to an ad for home typists with the potential to earn \$35,000 a year. She paid \$39.95, expecting to receive a list of clients in need of typing services. Instead, she got several books on how to improve her typing skills. Another woman called an 800 telephone number printed in an ad which was soliciting workers to address envelopes. She was then referred to a 900 number which contained a tape recorded message instructing her to contact the local chamber of commerce for names of companies that hire home workers. She was charged \$25 for the 900 call.

Mystery Shopping Jobs: Offers are tempting to people looking for part-time work with flexible hours. Mystery shopping jobs claim good pay, short hours, and a fun, interesting work environment. Most mystery shoppers only work 1-2 hours per job, and can accept or reject a job with just a day's notice. The work usually consists of visiting a store, making pre-determined purchases, and evaluating the customer service. There are variations, such as going to a restaurant or hotel, and evaluating the food, cleanliness, and overall attitude of the staff. In any case, the mystery shopper will fill out a report after their work is done, and turn it in to receive their pay.

Sounds like a fun, legitimate job, right? Well unfortunately, if you want to participate, you are likely to find hundreds of websites claiming to help you get daily work, all for a \$20 - \$30 fee. But in most cases, these websites have one intent - raking in your hard-earned cash, while providing very little useful information or resources for helping you get work as a mystery shopper. Most mystery shopping jobs do not last more than 2 hours.

In reality, 99% of these websites offer you nothing more than the following:

1. Outdated mystery shopping resources with non-working links, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses.
2. No customer service or help in finding jobs.
3. No refunds if you are unsatisfied. Most of these fly-by-night websites won't even respond to your refund requests, and once their website gets shut down due to complaints, they start another one under a different name.
4. Poorly designed sites with confusing navigation systems and information, and non-working pages.

Consumers should beware that of the hundreds of mystery shopping websites only a few are legitimate sources for daily work.

Utility Jobs: Classified ads sometimes claim that job openings are available with "a major telephone company." After calling for more information, consumers learn they must buy a sample test package for about \$35. Callers are falsely told that local telephone companies will reimburse them for any materials they purchase if they are not hired.

Traveling Sales Crews: As summer approaches and classes end, many young people look for summer and full time jobs. A classified ad that reads, "travel the country, high pay, all transportation and all expenses paid", may sound good, but may not be what it seems.

The ads target young adults to sell magazines or cleaning products door to door. The ads don't list an employer name, but give a local phone number, and the interviews are held in a local motel. When applicants accept the job, they usually are required to leave within a day to join a sales crew in the field. Complaints allege employees are subjected to poor and cramped living conditions, long hours of selling door to door with sales meetings and sales-pitch rehearsals late into the night. Employees claim that "all expenses paid" means they are given a small nightly sum for meals and personal expenses which can be deducted from their pay. Some employees don't get paid at all. They are told their earnings remain "on the books" and they are charged for hotel expenses and canceled orders. They may even be fined for misconduct. Some employees may find themselves in debt to the company and feel unable to leave.

If someone you know is tempted to join a traveling sales crew, make sure they get all the details in writing and check out the company with the Better Business Bureau and the Bureau of Consumer Protection. It could save young people a summer of hardship.

**Overseas/cruise jobs:** Over-seas job opportunities are frequently advertised for Australia, the Persian Gulf, and worldwide cruise ships. Some offer high paying jobs in Kuwait or adventures in Alaskan canneries. Most of these ads merely provide lists of potential employers in overseas locations. One Wisconsin woman answered an ad for a cruise line job. After providing a credit card number, she was charged \$129 for basic information about how to contact cruise companies.

**Airline Jobs:** Ads for employment opportunities in the airline industry lure interested persons into paying a fee (often as much as \$100) to obtain an application. Two women in Wisconsin were victimized after they responded to an ad for flight attendants. The women were told an international company was conducting interviews in Miami for attendants on its corporate aircraft. They were directed to wire \$180 as a partial payment for airfare to Miami. The women were promised they'd be reimbursed for all costs and would receive detailed job information in the mail. After sending the money, they received no plane tickets or job information.

### **Refunds**

Many of the companies promoting jobs boast about "guaranteed refunds." if you are not successfully placed. However, the conditional guarantees offered by companies make it difficult to obtain refunds. One company requires consumers to send a written refund request via certified mail no sooner than 90 days and no later than 105 days after getting information, obtain five rejection letters from the list of firms provided, and return all materials in resalable condition. Even then, handling and processing costs, plus a 20 percent restocking fee, are deducted from the refund.

### **Protect yourself**

- \* Check companies thoroughly before getting involved. Contact the Better Business Bureau, in Wisconsin at (800) 273-1002, or local Chamber of Commerce. Call the Bureau of Consumer Protection to check on complaints filed with the state: (800) 422-7128.
- \* Ask for information about the company, including its street address and the name of its owner or chief operating officer. Ask for a written explanation of income claims and benefits offered.
- \* Be suspicious of any job offer that requires an up-front fee. Be especially careful of requests to wire payments.
- \* Beware of employment ads that list a 900 telephone number. You will be charged either a flat fee or a per-minute cost for each 900 call.
- \* Use state job service offices for current government job listings.
- \* Check with local libraries for other job search information, including help with writing resumes and preparing for job interviews.

For more information, or to file a complaint, contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection at:

(800) 422-7128

2811 Agriculture Drive  
PO Box 8911  
Madison WI 53708-8911  
(608) 224-4976

FAX: (608) 224-4939

TTY: (608) 224-5058

E-MAIL: [DATCPHotline@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:DATCPHotline@Wisconsin.gov)

WEBSITE:

[www.datcp.state.wi.us](http://www.datcp.state.wi.us)