

TELEMARKETING AND DEMENTIA – NOT A GOOD MIX

A news release from the Iowa Attorney General on October 16, 2014 told a pretty disturbing story about how far some telemarketers will go to cheat vulnerable senior citizens. On October 16, a Polk County District Court judge issued a permanent injunction against a Las Vegas “health product” marketer and its owners. The court order barred Leading Health Source, Inc, from ever marketing to anyone in Iowa, and required them to refund \$44,000 to an elderly Cedar Rapids couple.

This sad story came to light when the couple’s daughter answered their phone, and listened to a telemarketing call intended for her mother. Her suspicions aroused, the daughter starting looking around, and found boxes and boxes of “health supplements” from this company in her parents’ home. She looked over their credit card bills, and found Leading Health Source Inc. sold \$44,000 of these supplements in the preceding twenty months. The woman’s parents were not in good health. Her father suffered from Alzheimer’s, and her mother suffered from several serious health problems.

The woman made a complaint to the Iowa Attorney General’s Office, who conducted an investigation. The investigation got hold of the telemarketer’s handwritten notes, on which he recorded the elderly woman showed “memory” issues and the man suffered from “dementia”. So they knew the couple was vulnerable. Nevertheless, this company sold thousands of pills, bearing such names as Brain Power, High Fusion, Hoodia, and Real O2. The telemarketer claimed these pills treated Alzheimer’s, diabetes, arthritis, and multiple sclerosis, even cured cancer. The company did not produce evidence any of these claims were true.

If you think you bought some of these same products from this company, you are entitled to a refund, and need to contact the Iowa Attorney General.

This story brings home several points I want to emphasize:

- it’s never a good idea to trust your health treatment or prevention to a stranger calling with a telemarketing pitch
- anyone who talks about a “miracle cure”, or “secret ingredient” for a medical treatment during a telemarketing call is lying
- be alert to unusual treatments or large expenditures by your elderly relatives. Don’t be afraid to ask questions and investigate

- report your suspicions. Nothing will happen to stop these scammers unless the scam is reported. The Iowa Attorney General is a good place to start. You can call the Consumer Protection Division at 888-77-4590. You can also report these scams to me.

BOGUS SUBSCRIPTION NOTICES

I received no reports on this yet, but since if you are reading this, you are a newspaper subscriber, I wanted to alert my readers.

The Federal Trade Commission issued an alert on October 27, 2014, concerning phony renewal notices. Consumers reported receiving renewal notices via US Mail, telling them their newspaper subscriptions expired, and asking for an immediate renewal. Well, the problem here is the companies sending the notices are not connected in any way with newspapers. This is just theft. Some of the renewals charged up to four times the regular rate.

How can you avoid this scam? Try these tips:

- sign up for auto-renewal and payment through direct withdrawal from your bank account. You will never be expired this way.
- call the newspaper subscription department, using a number from the phone book or on the newspaper. Verify the notice.
- Look for misspellings or errors on the notice, and pay attention to the return address. If the invoice comes from a company you never heard of, check it out with your newspaper.

This scam sounds similar to another one I know of, in which retail businesses received phony invoices from phone directories or city directories, to renew their advertising.

GRANDPARENT SCAM – OR YOUR NEIGHBOR’S GRANDSON SCAM

I received a report this week of a variation of the grandparent scam. In this case, a rural Wheatland woman reported she received a call from a young man who posed as the grandson of her next-door neighbor. He needed \$5000 to get bonded out of jail in Las Vegas, Nevada. He put his “lawyer” on the phone to provide the details. The “lawyer” instructed the woman to go to Walmart and wire transfer the money to Kentucky. This sounded very convincing, so the woman did as instructed. Fortunately for her, Moneygram, the wire transfer company, detected this as potential fraud, blocked the

transaction, and called the woman back. They asked her questions which confirmed this as fraud, and instructed her to come back to Walmart and get her money back. That was a close one!

You can report scams and fraud to me at Seniors vs. Crime at the Clinton County Sheriff's Office, 563-242-9211, extension 4433, or by email to randymeier@gapa911.us. Most of what I learn about, I hear from you.

End of column/rmeier