

BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU REPORTS TOP TEN SCAMS OF 2015

The Better Business Bureau (BBB), which is a non-profit private agency with the mission of fostering an honest and trustworthy marketplace, released its list of the top ten scams reported to BBB in 2015. Now this list reflects only what was reported up until December 14, so we are missing two weeks of information, but I think the trends are pretty well established.

Here's the list:

1. Tax scams – typically you receive a phone call from someone claiming to work for the IRS, and demanding money for payment of back taxes
2. Debt collections scams – you receive a call claiming you owe an unpaid debt, usually a payday loan. These callers sometimes pretend to be law enforcement or government agents, and make threats of arrest, all designed to scare people into paying
3. Sweepstakes or prizes – you are informed you won a sweepstakes, but need to pay some fee to claim the prize. Really, there is no prize. Never pay money to claim a prize
4. Tech support scam – callers claim to be computer technicians who detected some security threat, or virus afflicting your computer. They want you to allow them remote access into your computer. Really they are just hackers wanting to steal your money or passwords
5. Government grant scam – someone contacts you claiming you are eligible for a grant, but you must pay an application or processing fee. It's always a scam.
6. Advance fee loan scam – if you apply for a loan online, you might receive a reply asking for a deposit, fee, or some kind of payment to get the loan. Again, always a scam
7. Credit card scam – a caller claims to work for your bank or credit card company, and wants to verify some transaction, or “unlock” your card
8. Work from home scams – these often crop up when folks look for jobs online. If you make an online application, you risk getting your identity stolen, or if you take one of these jobs, you might find yourself handling stolen merchandise, or laundering money
9. Fake checks – these turn up in several different scams, but usually the scam is the same – you receive a check which is paying you an amount larger than expected. You are instructed to cash the check and

wire the difference. Because the check is counterfeit, it will bounce, but your money is gone by then

10. Lottery scam – similar to the sweepstakes scam, but in this one, you are notified you won a foreign lottery, but need to pay some upfront fees to collect. These lotteries are illegal, and really don't exist at all

In looking at what is reported to me, I'd say this list is pretty accurate as to what folks in this area saw in 2015, especially with the first two scams, the tax scam and the debt collector scams. The BBB reported almost one-fourth of the complaints involved the tax scam. These two scams get people very excited and scared, as the imposters making these calls make over-the-top threats of arrest, property seizure, lawsuits, and so forth.

The BBB report on this list goes on to tell us "what you can do", and sets out a number of measures, but I can just sum it up with one – NEVER SEND MONEY BY WIRE TRANSFER OR PREPAID DEBIT CARD TO SOMEONE YOU DON'T KNOW OR DID NOT MEET IN PERSON. If you only remember that one thing, your chances of getting scammed drop way, way, way down.

LIFELOCK IN TROUBLE IN THE COURTS

Every once in a while, someone will ask me what I think of them enrolling with Lifelock, to protect them from identity theft. Lifelock is a private company which sells identity theft protection services. They seem to advertise pretty heavily. I try to stay away from endorsing any specific company, but some news about Lifelock caught my eye.

On December 17, 2015, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) announced Lifelock agreed to pay \$100 million for violating a 2010 settlement order with the FTC. To set the story, in 2010, the FTC and the state attorneys general of 35 states, including Iowa and Illinois, entered into a settlement with Lifelock, in which the company agreed to refund consumers \$11 million, stop making deceptive claims, and strengthen their safeguards of personal information, it collected from its customers.

I read up on the 2010 settlement. Lifelock advertised it prevented identity theft, pretty much in all cases. And that was not even close to true. The FTC also found Lifelock's claims about keeping consumers' information secure not true.

In this latest go-round, the FTC dinged Lifelock because they did not establish systems to protect consumer information. They continued to advertise falsely on how they protected consumers' sensitive data. And they continued to make false advertising statements about identity theft protection.

The \$100 million settlement, to which Lifelock agreed, requires that money get refunded to customers. If you are a Lifelock customer, you might be hearing from them.

CONTACT SENIORS VS. CRIME

Let me know about scams, fraud, or other crookedness you run across. Most of what I learn, I learn from you. Contact me at Seniors vs. Crime, Clinton County Sheriff's Office, 563-242-9211 extension 4433, or email me at randymeier@gapa911.us

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