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**To:** Á  
**Subject:** Watch Out! The Text Message Scam is Back!



## Watch Out! The Text Message Scam is Back!

If you receive an unexpected text message with a link and nothing more, or one that offers you something "for free" - don't be tempted to click on the link! Here's why:

If you click on the link, you reach a site that supposedly offers the free merchandise. But to get the "free" prize, you have to reveal a lot of personal information - and maybe hand over some money, too.

Once you enter your information, you might be directed to another site and told you have to participate in a number of "offers" to be eligible for the gift card. Some of the sites require you to sign up for skin care products, government grants, dietary supplements, book of the month clubs, credit cards, or identity theft protection - most of which require you to pay a shipping fee and cancel a membership within a certain time to avoid being charged monthly.

The requirement to share personal information and pay money isn't disclosed until you've been drawn into the scam.

Bottom line: "Free" merchandise websites rarely live up to their promises. Need proof? The Federal Trade Commission recently brought eight cases against 29 marketers accused of sending more than 180 million unwanted spam text messages to consumers.

Most of the consumers who dealt with the scam artists never got the free gift they were promised. Many people left the websites once they realized they hadn't won anything and that the offer for "free" merchandise required them to pay.

But the scam still worked. It worked the second the unsuspecting consumer clicked on the website. At that moment, the consumers' phone number and other personal information fell into the hands of the scammer, who likely sold it to other internet swindlers. The original scammer might even earn commissions on deals closed by the second-generation scammer.

When you see a spam text offering a gift, a gift card, or a "free" service, keep these tips in mind:

- Delete any text that asks you to confirm or provide personal information: Legitimate companies don't ask for information like your account numbers or passwords by email or text.
- Don't reply, and don't click on links in the message: Links can install malware on your computer and take you to spoof sites that look real but whose purpose is to steal your information.
- Contact your cell carrier. Most providers have specific instructions to report SMS (text) SPAM, block numbers and in some cases websites.
- Register all your phones, including wireless with the Do Not Call List. Text messages sent to phones on the Do Not Call list are in violation of the law and can be reported to either the Federal Trade Commission or Federal Communications Commission.
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