



Who We Are

Attorney General
Tom Miller
Office Directory

What We Do

Protecting Consumers
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Consumer Advisory Bulletin

Magazine Subscription Schemes

Problems with magazine subscriptions ranked second for total number of complaints received last year by the Consumer Protection Division. Some involved simple mistakes made by companies -- but other complaints involved illegal tactics by questionable telemarketing companies unrelated to the magazines themselves.

Here are some typical problems: Telemarketers who trick you into paying hundreds of dollars for multi-year subscriptions to magazines you don't want or can't afford . . . so-called sweepstakes that sign you up for a subscription without your approval . . . solicitations for magazines at "pennies a day for shipping and handling" that turn out to be very expensive . . . and "special promotions" for "free issues" that actually sign you up for costly subscriptions that are difficult to cancel.

Follow these tips to avoid magazine subscription problems:

- Order directly from the publisher. You can use inserts from a magazine. You are likely to get a better deal from publishers than independent telemarketers.
- Don't necessarily believe a telemarketer is calling from the publisher. Fraudulent telemarketers have misled consumers about whom they represent.
- Don't feel obligated to subscribe to magazines when you enter a sweep- stakes. It is illegal for sweepstakes companies to require you to purchase magazines in order to win the prize.
- Be cautious when signing up for "free introductory issues" of a magazine. The company may begin a subscription and send you bills unless you notify them otherwise. Pay attention to terms they specify for cancelling a subscription.
- Don't give your checking account number to a telemarketer for an automatic debit billing. Fraudulent telemarketers may withdraw all the funds from your account.
- Find out the total cost of your order, the period of time covered, and what your payment schedule will be. "Pennies a day" for so-called "postage and handling" costs can add up to hundreds of dollars in monthly payments.

For more information or to file a complaint, write to the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division, Hoover Building, Des Moines, IA 50319. The telephone number is 515-281-5926.

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