

BBB: What to know before signing up for a free trial offer

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Milwaukee, Wis. – Free trial offers are an extremely popular marketing tactic, especially for subscription services. With so many consumers shopping online, there is no way to touch, see, or otherwise experience a product before buying it. That means free trials can be a win-win situation for both sellers and buyers. Consumers get to “try before they buy,” and sellers get to cultivate interest in their product and hopefully make a sale. That said, there are a few aspects of free trials consumers should be aware of if they want to avoid unwanted charges.

How to Take Advantage of Free Trial Offers

- **Review the signup form and look for pre-checked boxes.** If you sign up for a free trial online, look for boxes that have already been checked, advises the [Federal Trade Commission](#). That checkmark “may give the company the green light to continue the offer past the free trial or sign you up for more products.”

- **Mark your calendar.** Your free trial probably has a time limit. Once that passes, if you haven't canceled your "order," you may be on the hook for more products. Know the cancellation date and put it on your calendar.
- **Always review your credit and debit card statements.** This will help you to know right away if you are being charged for something you didn't order. If you see charges you didn't agree to, contact the company directly to sort out the situation. If that doesn't work, call your credit card company to dispute the charge. Ask the credit card company to reverse the charge because you didn't actively order the additional merchandise.
- **Research the company online.** See what other people are saying about the company's free trials — and its service. The [FTC points out](#) that "complaints from other customers can tip you off to 'catches' that might come with the trial."
- **Find the terms and conditions for the offer.** Even if you heard about an offer through a radio, TV, or print ad, the company should still provide the details on their website. As many [Scam Tracker](#) reports show, if you can't find the terms and conditions or can't understand exactly what you're agreeing to, you shouldn't sign up.
- **Always protect your personal information online.** When you sign up for a free trial online, you'll likely need to provide some basic personal information and your credit card number. Before you hand over your information, review the site's privacy policy and make sure the website is secure, that is, it starts with "https://" and has a lock icon on the sign-up page.
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