

BBB: Scam alert: Lost pet? Watch out for this scam

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Milwaukee, Wis. – Posting on social media is a great way to alert a wide range of people about a lost pet. Unfortunately, that same publicity can put you at risk for scams. Con artists comb social posts to find targets who have lost their beloved pets.

How the scam works

You recently lost your pet, so you turn to social media to alert friends and neighbors. You create a public post – or even a group – to help spread the word. You share your phone number and other details, so people can easily reach you.

A few days later, you get a text message from someone claiming to have found your lost dog or cat. You ask them to describe your pet and/or send a photo, but the conversation quickly takes a strange turn. The scammer will give excuses, such as being out of town or not having a working smartphone, for why they can't snap a photo. Instead, the person will pressure you for money (or a gift card) to return your pet. Although you may be tempted to do anything to see your dog or cat returned safely, don't pay up! The scammer doesn't have your pet. They will just take the money and disappear.

In other cases, the pet has actually been stolen, and the scammer will ask for payment for the safe return– or they may try to sell your pet online to another person.

How to avoid a lost pet scam

Follow these tips to prevent falling victim to a pet loss scam:

- **Limit the information in your social posts:** If you post on Facebook or other social media, omit information about unique physical attributes. This can help you verify if someone really found your pet.
- **Watch for spoofed numbers:** If you get a call from someone claiming to have your pet, ask them for a phone number where you can call them back. Scammers often spoof phone numbers, so they appear to be calling from somewhere else.
- **Ask for a photo:** If a caller claims to have your pet in their possession, ask them to send a current picture. If the “finder” gets defensive or makes a lot of excuses, it’s a red flag.
- **Never wire money or use a prepaid debit card** to pay anyone you don’t know. This is the same as sending cash.
- **Microchip and/or ID tag your pet:** Consider having your veterinarian microchip your pet, and make sure they always wear a collar and ID tag. Newer ID tags with GPS trackers can be purchased, to find your pet’s location.
- **Call the police** if your pet was stolen, or if you see that someone else is trying to sell your pet online.

For more information:

To learn more about scams, go to BBB Scam Tips ([BBB.org/scamtips](https://www.bbb.org/scamtips)). To report a scam, go to BBB Scam Tracker ([BBB.org/scamtracker](https://www.bbb.org/scamtracker))

For more information or further inquiries, contact the Wisconsin BBB at www.bbb.org/wisconsin, 414-847-6000 or 1-800-273-1002. Consumers also can find more information about how to protect themselves from scams by following the Wisconsin BBB on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

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