

Better Business Bureau: BBB Tip: The naughty list - BBB's 12 scams of Christmas

Posted on Wednesday, Dec 14, 2022

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Milwaukee, Wis. – With 2022 quickly winding down, Better Business Bureau has compiled our naughty list of the top 12 scams of Christmas. When shopping or donating this holiday season, watch out for schemes trying to swipe your cash or steal your personal information.

You can avoid most of the scams on this list by taking a few simple precautions. Always exercise caution with social media ads promoting discounted items, holiday events, job opportunities, and donation requests, as well as direct messages from strangers. If you are asked to make a payment or donation by wire transfer, through a third party, or by prepaid debit or gift card, treat it as a red flag.

Be mindful of these scams that could cut into your holiday cheer:

1. **Misleading social media ads:** As you scroll through your social media feed, you often see products advertised. Always research before you buy. [BBB Scam Tracker](#) receives daily reports of people paying for items that they never receive, getting charged monthly for a free trial they never signed up for, or receiving an item that is counterfeit or much different from the one advertised. The [2022 BBB Online Scams Report](#) found that online purchase scams were the most common cons reported to Scam Tracker. Before ordering, check out the business profile on [BBB.org](#) and read the reviews.

Read more about [misleading ads](#), [free trial offers](#), and [counterfeit goods](#).

2. **Social media gift exchanges:** Each holiday season this scheme pops back up, and this year is no different. A newer version of this scam revolves around exchanging bottles of wine; another suggests purchasing \$10 gifts online. Another twist asks you to submit your email into a list where participants get to pick a name and send money to strangers to “pay it forward.” There is even a twist about “Secret Santa Dog” where you buy a \$10 gift for your “secret dog.”

In all of these versions, participants unwittingly share their personal information, along with those of their family members and friends, and are further tricked into buying and shipping gifts or money to unknown individuals. And- it’s an illegal pyramid scheme.

Read more about the [social media gift exchange](#).

3. **Holiday apps:** Apple’s App Store and Google Play list dozens of holiday-themed apps where children can video chat live with Santa, light the menorah, watch Santa feed live reindeer, track his sleigh on Christmas Eve, or relay their holiday wish lists. Review privacy policies to see what information will be collected. Be wary of free apps, as they can sometimes contain more advertising than apps that require a nominal fee. Free apps can also contain malware.

Read more about [holiday apps](#).

4. **Alerts about compromised accounts:** BBB has been receiving reports on [Scam Tracker](#) about a con claiming your Amazon, Paypal, Netflix or bank account has been compromised. Victims receive an email, call, or text message which explains that there has been suspicious activity on one of their accounts, and it further urges them to take immediate action to prevent the account from being compromised. Be extra cautious about unsolicited calls, emails, and texts.

Read more about [compromised account scams](#).

5. **Free gift cards:** Nothing brings good cheer like the word “FREE.” Scammers have been known to take advantage of this weakness by sending bulk phishing

emails requesting personal information to receive free gift cards. In some of these emails, scammers impersonate legitimate companies and promise gift cards to reward their loyal customers. They may also use pop-up ads or send text messages with links saying you were randomly selected as the winner for a prize.

If you have received an unsolicited email with gift card offers, do not open it. Instead, mark it as spam or junk. However, if you opened the email, do not click on any links.

Read more about [gift card scams](#).

6. **Temporary holiday jobs:** Retailers typically hire seasonal workers to help meet the demands of holiday shoppers. Shippers and delivery services are top holiday employers this year because of the increase in online orders and the need to get most of these packages delivered before Christmas. These jobs are a great way to make extra money, sometimes with the possibility of turning into a long-term employment opportunity. However, job seekers need to be wary of employment scams aimed at stealing money and personal information from job applicants. Keep an eye out for opportunities that seem too good to be true.

Read more about [holiday job scams](#).

7. **Look-alike websites:** The holiday season brings endless emails offering deals, sales, and bargains. Be wary of emails with links enclosed. Some may lead to look-alike websites created by scammers to trick people into downloading malware, making dead-end purchases, and sharing private information. If you are uncertain about the email, do not click any of the links. Instead, hover over them to see where they reroute.

Read more on [look-alike websites](#).

8. **Fake charities:** The last few weeks of the year is a busy time for charitable donations. Donors are advised to look out for fraudulent charities and scammers pretending to be individuals in need. Avoid impromptu donation decisions to unfamiliar organizations. Responsible organizations will welcome a gift tomorrow as

much as they do today. Verify a charity at BBB's [Give.org](https://www.give.org) or on the [Canada Revenue Agency](https://www.canadarevenue.ca) website. Where possible, donate to the charity through their website and use a credit card. Read more about [fake charities](#).

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9. **Fake shipping notifications:** More consumers are making purchases online, and there is also an increase in the number of notifications about shipping details from retailers and carriers. Scammers are using this new surge to send phishing emails with links enclosed that may allow unwanted access to your private information or download malware onto your device. They may also try to trick people into paying new shipping fees.

Read more about [delivery and package scams](#).

10. **Pop-up holiday virtual events:** Many local in-person events such as pop-up holiday markets or craft fairs, have moved online. Scammers are creating fake event pages, social media posts, and emails, charging admission for what used to be a free event. The goal is to steal credit card information. Confirm with the organizer of the event if there is an admission fee. In cases where there is a charge, use a credit card. If the event is free, watch for scammers trying to claim otherwise.

Read more about [pop-up holiday shops](#).

11. **Top holiday wishlist items:** Low priced luxury goods, jewelry, designer clothing, and electronics are almost always cheap counterfeits and knockoffs. The same applies for popular toys. This year, Squishmallows, Magic Mixies Magical Misting Crystal Ball, Snap Circuits, Breyer Horses Unicorn Magic Wood Stable, and National Geographic Break Open Geodes are some of the items in high demand. Be very cautious when considering purchasing these popular toys from resellers on Facebook Marketplace and other platforms.

Read more about [holiday hot toy scams](#).

12. **Puppy scams:** Many families may be considering adding a furry friend to their

household this year. However, be on the lookout for scams. Many would-be pet owners turn to the internet to find their future cat or dog, but experts say a shocking 80% of sponsored pet advertisements may be fake. Be sure to see the pet in person before making a purchase.

Read more about [pet scams](#).

For more information:

For general information on how to avoid scams, visit [BBB.org/AvoidScams](https://www.bbb.org/AvoidScams). For more advice, read [BBB's tips on online shopping](#). If you've spotted an online scam, report it to [BBB ScamTracker](#).

[Read more BBB Holiday Tips at BBB.org/holiday.](https://www.bbb.org/holiday)

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](#).

ABOUT BBB: For more than 100 years, the Better Business Bureau has been helping people find businesses, brands and charities they can trust. In 2021, people turned to BBB more than 200 million times for BBB Business Profiles on 6.3 million businesses and Charity Reports on 25,000 charities, all available for free at [BBB.org](https://www.bbb.org). There are local, independent BBBs across the United States, Canada and Mexico, including BBB Serving Wisconsin which was founded in 1939 and serves the state of Wisconsin.