

## Dealing with Internet Fraud

Judging by the sheer number of solicitations and “can’t miss” propositions that you receive every day in your e-mails or that are posted on message boards or Web sites, Internet scams may seem inescapable. While you can’t wholly avoid seeing online solicitations that may be fraudulent, here are some tips on how to deal with them.

### Don’t Judge by Initial Appearances

It may seem obvious, but you need to remember that just because something appears on the Internet - no matter how impressive or professional the Web site looks – it doesn’t mean it’s true. The availability of software, which allows anyone, at minimal cost, to set up a professional-looking Web site means that criminals can make their Web sites look as impressive as those of legitimate e-commerce merchants.

### Be Careful About Giving Out Valuable Personal Data Online

If you see e-mail messages from someone you don’t know that asks you for personal data - such as your Social Security number, credit-card number, or password - don’t just send the data without knowing more about the person that is asking. Criminals have been known to send messages in which they pretend to be, for example, a systems administrator or Internet service provider representative in order to persuade people online that they should disclose valuable personal data. While secure transactions with known e-commerce sites are fairly safe, especially if you use a credit card, non-secure messages to unknown recipients are not. Verify that the site is secure by looking for a padlock icon on the bottom of the Web page.

### Be Especially Careful About Online Communications with People Who Conceal Their True Identity

If you receive an e-mail in which the sender refuses to disclose their full identity, or the sender uses an e-mail header that has no useful identifying data (e.g., W6T7S8@provider.com), that may be an indication

that the person doesn’t want to leave any information that could allow you to contact them later if you have a dispute over undelivered goods for which you paid. As a result, you should be highly wary about relying on advice that such people give you if they are trying to persuade you to entrust your money to them.

### Watch Out for “Advance-Fee” Demands

In general, you need to look carefully at any online seller of goods or services who wants you to send checks or money orders immediately to a post office box before you receive the goods or services you’ve been promised. Legitimate startup “dot.com” companies, of course, may not have the brand-name recognition of long-established companies, and still be fully capable of delivering what you need at a fair price. Even so, using the Internet to research online companies that aren’t known to you is a reasonable step to take before you decide to entrust a significant amount of money to such companies.

### If You Have Been Victimized

If you think that you’ve been the victim of a fraud scheme that involved the Internet, you can file a complaint online with the Internet Crime Complaint Center (<http://www.ic3.gov/>), a joint project of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the National White Collar Crime Center (<http://www.nw3c.org/>). In addition, you can file complaints about specific types of fraud with the following agencies:

- Commodities Fraud: Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) at <http://www.cftc.gov/cftc/cftchome.htm>.
- Consumer Fraud: Federal Trade Commission (FTC) at <http://www.ftc.gov/>.
- Securities Fraud: Securities and Exchange Commission’s Enforcement Division Complaint Center at <http://www.investingonline.org/aio/complaintcenter.html>, or your State securities regulators at <http://www.nasaa.org/home/index.cfm>.