

## Steer Clear of Fraudulent Phone Pitches

Many legitimate companies and charities contact consumers by phone, but many con artists do, too. They rob people every day, with phones as their weapons. Anyone can be a victim, no matter how old, how well educated, or how well off. According to the National Consumers League, which operates the National Fraud Information Center, the most common scams are:

- Promises of credit cards or loans, guaranteed, even if your credit is bad
- Bogus notices that you won a prize, sweepstakes, or lottery
- Promises that you can make lots of money working at home
- Phony offers for cheap magazine subscriptions or renewals
- Charges for memberships in discount buyers clubs you never agreed to join
- Free trips or discount travel that never materialize
- Switching your phone company without your consent
- Sales of unnecessary credit card loss protection
- Promises of big returns on investments with little or no risk

Some pitches are blatantly fraudulent. It's illegal for telemarketers to charge fees upfront when they promise to get you a credit card or loan or to fix your credit report. It's also illegal for telemarketers to ask for payment to enter sweepstakes or lotteries or claim your prize. Protect yourself by recognizing these other danger signs:



- Pressure to act immediately
- Refusal to send written information
- Use of scare tactics
- Demands to send payment by wire or courier
- Offers to get recover money you've recently lost in scams, for a fee
- Requests for financial account numbers even though you're not paying for anything

Be especially wary if you get a call from someone claiming to be from a company you do business with, asking to verify personal information they should already have. Get the caller's name and number. Then hang up and contact the company directly to confirm before providing any information.

When you answer the phone, be prepared. Think about the advice you would give to someone else about how to detect fraud, and follow that advice yourself. Don't hesitate to hang up on suspicious calls.