

NEWS FROM SCDCA

South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BACK-TO-SCHOOL SCAMS (PART TWO): CONTRACT AND MEMBERSHIP SCAMS

Columbia, SC..... The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs (SCDCA) is helping students and parents prepare for the school year with a three-part series dedicated to “Back-to-School Scams.” SCDCA began with a look at scholarship and student aid scams, but is now providing information on modeling contract and club membership scams.

Modeling Scams

How It Works

“If you’ve got the look, look out!” This warning from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) could not be timelier. Modeling scams usually surface at the beginning of the school year, preying on unsuspecting students looking for a well-paying after-school hobby. Scammers set-up modeling agency fronts at hotels, conference centers, and shopping malls. Representatives advertise open auditions for a limited time. Participants are told that selected few will receive “call-back” invitations. What the participants do not realize is that ALL participants are called back and then pressured into putting money upfront for portfolios, an initial photo shoot, or contract fees. Money in hand, the scammer skips town.

Bottom Line

If it sounds too-good-to-be true, it is. Do not pay money upfront for a promised modeling career.

Club Memberships

How It Works

What they offer is perfectly legitimate – books, DVDs, CDs – but what you pay may leave you wanting. Whether the offer is 11 CDs for 99 cents or new books every month, the total cost is often far more

About the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs:

Established by the Consumer Protection code in 1974, The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs represents the interests of South Carolina Consumers.

Our mission is to protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, mediation, enforcement and education.

For more information, visit www.scconsumer.gov.

than the advertised deal. While many clubs and memberships are perfectly legitimate after-school hobbies for students, some require a minimum level of purchases to avoid fees or penalties. Some deals offer a free trial but automatically “opt-in” the consumer to a paid membership after the trial period expires. Other offers may debit your account with an Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT), causing unexpected charges at best and overdraft fees at worst. In some cases, students or parents will receive unordered merchandise at their home address. The order comes with an invoice that the scammer is hoping you will pay. If you did not order the merchandise, however, you are not obliged to pay. Simply call the company, so they can foot the bill for returning the package. If the company refuses to honor your request, you are not obliged to return the merchandise.

Bottom Line

If you didn't order it, don't pay. Before you join club, take a second look at the return policy, membership requirements, and payment methods. **Above all: read the fine print.**

For more information on back-to-school scams, contact the Public Information Division at 803.734.4296, toll free in SC at 1.800.922.1594, or visit www.sccoconsumer.gov.

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