

BBB Warns to Use Caution Before Clicking on Shopping Surveys!

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We're in the midst of the holiday shopping season, and you may see offers for the best deals yet. It can feel even more exciting if you see a claim that as part of a holiday deal, the "company" is offering a free product, discount, or gift card to anyone who completes a short questionnaire or survey. Unfortunately, some of these offers are fake and you will need to use caution.

Real businesses use surveys to understand their customers or get feedback on their products and service. However, phony surveys have become a very common way for scammers to phish for personal information. These schemes typically come via text messages and emails containing links that could even lead to the theft of valuable account information from unsuspecting victims.

Why do scammers use surveys? Most people like to give their opinions – especially if there's a discount or other reward on offer. While someone might put up their guard during a sales pitch, surveys can seem harmless, meaning it's easy to accidentally share information that a scammer can use.

How it Works:

Typically, these messages will falsely claim to be from a well-known chain store to try to add authenticity. They also usually push for quick action.

If you click on the provided link, you won't go to the store's official website. Instead, it will take you to a third-party website where you'll be asked to fill out a form that asks you for personal information, such as your full name, address, email, and more.

Even if you don't provide your details, just by clicking the link you could be downloading malware -including spyware -onto your device. Spyware is software used by scammers to monitor the information you're typing. This means they could capture your login information and passwords to gain access to your online accounts, including bank accounts.

You can identify and avoid fake surveys, using these tips:

Watch out for rewards that sound too good to be true. Remember that legitimate businesses run surveys to understand their customers. They may offer a modest discount to encourage participation, but the reward is not the focus. If someone offers you a valuable product or gift card in exchange for completing a two-minute survey, it's probably a scam.

Limited time offers could be a red flag. Scammers often use a sense of urgency to get their victims to hand over valuable information without thinking. Be careful if a text message says something like, "If you complete this survey in the next 10 minutes, you'll win a prize!" Don't let yourself be pushed into action without really examining the message first. Remember that scammers conceal their identity. Many scam surveys are very vague about their purpose and who is running them. If you can't figure out who or where the survey is coming from, don't take it.

Watch for typos, bad grammar, and incorrect company logos. Scammers can easily copy a brand's name, but awkward wording and poor grammar are typically a giveaway that the message is a scam. Other times, scammers might not use the right company logo.

Hover over URLs to reveal their true destination. Typically, the hyperlinked text will say one thing, but the link will point somewhere else. Make sure the links actually lead to the business's official website, not a variation of the domain name. But don't click on it to find out. Simply hover over it to see what site it shows is associated with the link.

Do some research. If you aren't sure about a survey, do an internet search to find out more information. Look for links to the survey on a business's official website. You can also do a search using the survey name and the word "scam" to see if there are any reports about it being a fake. Feel free to call your BBB at 800-763-4222 for assistance as well.

While the holidays can be a peak time for these messages, you should stay alert for similar survey scams all year round. For more information check out BBB's signs of a fake survey which includes real examples of fake surveys.

If you've spotted a survey scam, please report it to BBB.org/ScamTracker. Your report can help others avoid falling victim.

Kelvin Collins is president & CEO of the Better Business Bureau serving the Fall Line Corridor, serving 77 counties in East Alabama, West Georgia, Southwest Georgia, Central Georgia, East Georgia, and Western South Carolina. This tips column is provided through the local BBB and the International Association of Better Business Bureaus (IABBB). The Better Business Bureau sets standards for ethical business behavior, monitors compliance and helps consumers identify trustworthy businesses. Questions or complaints about a specific company or charity should be referred directly to the BBB at Phone: 1-800-763-4222, Web site: BBB.org or E-mail: info@centralgeorgia.bbb.org.