

# BBB Tip: “Brushing” scam indicates a serious problem for victims!

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**F**ree boxloads of merchandise from Amazon or other companies right on your doorstep! What could be bad about getting the Santa treatment all year long? Plenty! Better Business Bureau (BBB) warns consumers that this recent scam has a scary downside. You are not the one who hit the jackpot; a scammer is the real winner.

This scam is called brushing, and it has recently been popping up nationwide. Suddenly, boxes of unordered (by the recipient) merchandise from Amazon or other online sellers begin arriving. There is no return address, or sometimes it just appears to come from Amazon or another retailer, and the receiver has yet to learn who ordered the items. The items are varied. For example, in one case, a humidifier, a hand warmer, a flashlight, a Bluetooth speaker, and a computer vacuum cleaner arrived unordered. Often, the items received are lightweight and inexpensive to ship, such as ping pong balls, face masks, or [seeds from China](#).

Why would such merchandise be sent to you if you didn't request it? The companies, usually foreign, third-party sellers that are sending the items are simply using your address that they discovered online. They intend to make it appear that you wrote a glowing online review of their merchandise and that you are a verified buyer of that merchandise. They then post a fake, positive review to improve their products' ratings, which means more sales. The payoff is highly profitable from their perspective.

In a recent [BBB Scam Tracker Report](#), one consumer shared, "A mysterious package was delivered to my home from a person I do not know, without me ordering any such package. When I tried to look up the return address, the search returned "brushing scam" hits."

## Why it's bad news for you

The fact that someone could have the items sent to you as if you purchased them indicates that they have some of your personal information, such as your name, address, and, possibly, phone number. Once the information is online, it could be used for numerous crooked enterprises.

The fake online review angle is only one way they benefit. By using the brushing scam, they also are increasing their sales numbers. After all, they aren't purchasing the items since the payment goes right back to them. Increased sales numbers, even though padded with fake purchases, look good for the company and help lead to more sales.

Then there is the “[porch pirate](#)” angle. There are instances where thieves use other people's mailing addresses and accounts, then watch for the delivery of the package so they can steal it from the door before the resident gets it.

## What can you do?

- **Notify the retailer.** Brushing and fake reviews are against Amazon's policies, so contact [Amazon Customer Service](#) if this happens to you and the product appears to come from Amazon. They will investigate and take action against the bad actor. Amazon also takes security seriously and encourages customers to [report fraudulent purchases](#) or other security issues. If the package appears to come through another established business, go directly to their website to get their contact information. If you prefer to contact the business by phone, be cautious about [searching for support phone numbers](#).
- **Attempt to identify the sender.** If you can identify the sender of unordered packages, consider checking for potential false reviews in your name - and ask for the reviews to be removed.
- **Check your account for recent orders.** Some targets of brushing scams can be deluged with unordered packages, creating a serious problem. If this happens, consider whether to refuse package

delivery at your home address and temporarily direct items that you did order to a package acceptance service.

- **Change your account passwords.** This may be a sign that personal information has been compromised, and to improve account security, keep a close eye on credit reports and credit card bills.
- **You are allowed to keep the merchandise.** The [Federal Trade Commission](#) says you have a legal right to keep unordered merchandise.
- **Protect your identity.** BBB advises to take all necessary precautions to [prevent identity theft](#). Be careful when entering personal information online, and ensure you use a secure site.

Visit [BBB.org](#) for more information regarding shipments of unordered merchandise or to report suspicious activities to [BBB Scam Tracker](#).

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*Kelvin Collins is president & CEO of the Better Business Bureau serving the Fall Line Corridor, serving 77 counties in East Alabama, West Georgia, South-west 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](mailto:info@centralgeorgia.bbb.org).*