



# **CONSUMER ALERT**

## **Office of Consumer Affairs**

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## **Beware Of Calls Offering Prizes**

### **They may be selling multiple magazine subscriptions**

A City of Green resident reported receiving an unsolicited telemarketing call explaining that she had been entered in a drawing for \$1 million because she is a preferred customer of MasterCard or Visa. The caller fired off the business name and that they were located in Florida so quickly that the consumer barely got the information. The telemarketer immediately began asking for information such as the resident's home address and what type of magazines she preferred. However, when the consumer began asking questions, the telemarketer hung up on her. After the Office of Consumer Affairs received the complaint, it was discovered that the telemarketer's number had been disconnected.

"It is not uncommon for an unscrupulous salesperson to hang up once a consumer starts asking questions. Those consumers are less likely to buy so the callers want to move on to the next victim who may not ask questions and just agree," says Cynthia Sich, Director of the Office of Consumer Affairs. "The new angle these fraudulent telemarketers have taken is disconnecting the telephone number they called from to avoid those consumer who complain or attempt to call back."

There are many variations of this type of telemarketing, but typically the caller says you have been entered in a contest or have already won a fabulous prize. For credibility, you are told your entry is based on a very common factor such as credit card use, or visiting a national chain restaurant or store. Soon the caller mentions that you are eligible to receive multiple magazine subscriptions for just pennies a day, when it could actually end up costing you more than the publisher's subscription cost and a package deal could run a few hundred dollars. If your account information is requested for "qualification" or "verification" purposes, it may be used to debit your account without your permission and you will need to watch your accounts for any unauthorized charges.

If you receive a telemarketing call, remember that the Ohio Telephone Solicitation Sales Act requires that within the first sixty seconds of a the call, the telemarketer must state their true name and the company on whose behalf the call is being made, state that the call is for sales purposes and identify the product being sold. If the offer includes the promise of prizes or gifts, the sales pitch must come first and you must be told if a purchase or payment is required to win a prize or to participate. If your call does not comply, hang up and report it to the Office of Consumer Affairs because the caller is breaking the law.

### **Consumer Tips**

- ✓ Have the company repeat their name, address, telephone number and get their website address.
- ✓ Do not be afraid to ask questions:
  - How long does the subscription last – one year or two and how many magazines?
  - How will I be billed – monthly or in one lump sum?
  - What is the yearly cost of each magazine and the total package price?
  - What are my cancellation rights?
- ✓ Pay by credit card, so that if you experience any problems receiving the magazines, you can dispute the charge with your credit card company.
- ✓ Do research on the company before you buy, but if you did agree to purchase you still can follow up on the company afterwards with the Office of Consumer Affairs at (330) 643-2879.
- ✓ If you no longer want telemarketing calls register your home and cellular phone numbers with the Do Not Call Registry by calling 888-382-1222 or online at [www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov). When calling, you must call from the telephone number you are registering.