SCAM Alerts

University departments are often targets of unscrupulous companies or individuals who canvass phone numbers and monitor companies' Internet buying practices. They hope to find victims who will unwittingly acknowledge their attempts to sell bogus, damaged, or discontinued products at exorbitant prices. The most common commodities are advertising, copier toner, printer cartridges, and latex gloves. We've titled these "supplier scams".

Summary: If a telephone or e-mail solicitor contacts you offering a "special sale," it could be a supplier scam. If an unknown solicitor calls to ask for your shipping address, it could be a supplier scam. If you receive goods that were not ordered, it could be a supplier scam. Read the guidelines below to find out how to recognize a scam and what to do should you suspect one.

If you identify a supplier scam, immediately contact Blair Blankinship, Director of Procurement at 410-837-5714 or by e-mail to bblankinship@ubalt.edu.

How do you identify supplier scams? Because these solicitors often know the type of item you normally order, identifying a scam can be difficult. Here are some tips:

If the price is too good to be true, it probably is. Suppliers involved in scams assume that you don't compare prices or check your invoices. In a recent incident, a scam supplier attempted to sell another institution copier toner valued at $25 for over $600 with shipping and handling costs. Don't fall for unreasonable discounts, as there are usually hidden costs.

Be aware of the "sales pitch." Here are some common examples:

"We're raising prices and have several cartons at the old price."

"We're selling discontinued items at close-out prices."

"This is a call on behalf of [department's usual supplier]."

"We have free items or gifts for ordering."

"You must order today to take advantage of the price."

"We're a function of your service agreement."

"We understand that you have "x" brand copier (or printer, FAX). If you order now, you can you avoid a price increase."

"We had a fire at the family office supply business. We need to raise money fast, and I'm just helping out."

"Dad died, and we're closing the company. I'm just helping my Mom out."

"The University President referred me to you."

"The price increase has just been announced but if you order now, you can avoid it."

"Our 25th Anniversary gift to our customers is ready to ship to you. What color do you want?"

Other ways to identify a scam:

-Scammers won't give their full names or provide telephone numbers.

-The company's name is similar to your normal supplier's name.

-They won't send you a quotation or anything in writing.

-Scammers ask for your Social Security number or credit card

number so you can qualify, or to identify your purchase.

Don't be a victim. You can guard against supplier scams by using the following guidelines:

· Allow only designated department buyers to place orders.

· Use only known companies - or ask for references.

· Don't give any information about your office equipment over the telephone or via e-mail to unfamiliar suppliers.

· Don't respond to unsolicited e-mails from suppliers you don't know.

· Never place an order via e-mail to a supplier with whom you are unfamiliar.

· Return or refuse all items received from an apparent scam.

· Do not authorize payment for transactions you believe to be scams.

Links to Better Business Bureau Articles:

Phony Invoice Schemes link to http://www.bbb.org/library/ba-inv.asp

Office Supply Schemes & Paper Pirates

link to http://www.bbb.org/library/ossapp.asp

Schemes Against Business link to http://www.bbb.org/library/ba-scheme.asp

Other interesting web sites:

Hoaxes link to http://www.nonprofit.net/hoax/default.htm

National Fraud Information Center link to http://www.overture.com/d/search/p/netscape/?Keywords=national+fraud+information+center

Scams Against Businesses

link to http://www.fraud.org/scamsagainstbusinesses/

Consumer Protection link to http://www.ftc.gov/ftc/consumer.htm

Avoid Credit Card Fraud

link to http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/conline/pubs/credit/cards.htm

Federal Consumer Information Center

link to http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/

For advice or assistance please contact Blair Blankinship at 410-837-5714.