



## Scams – how to avoid becoming a victim

Scam is a popular term for an attempt to cheat you out of your money. Scams come in a multitude of forms and new ones are being thought up every day. The most frequent type of scams that the Isle of Man authorities are alerted to every year are fake lotteries and prize draws, get rich quick investments (also known as “boiler room” scams) and pleas to help out people who are trying to transfer funds out of African countries. “Scammers” can make contact by telephone, letter, e-mail, fax or text.

The common link between all scams is the apparent opportunity to gain significant amounts of money for very little investment or effort.

The “scammers” are extremely clever and all sorts of people get duped – not just the vulnerable members of society but also those amongst us who feel they have nothing to lose by responding to these contacts. The truth is the losses can be terrifying – people lose thousands, often having their bank accounts cleared out through providing the “scammers” with their bank account details. In the UK three million people fall victim to scams every year and residents of the Isle of Man are not immune.

It’s not only consumers who fall victim to scams – many target businesses. These types of scams tend to be bogus invoices for goods or services not ordered or received.

So how can you spot a scam?

- It sounds too good to be true: Beware of hype and extravagant promises. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- You are contacted out of the blue: You may get a phone call, e-mail or letter from someone you've never heard of.
- You have to make a quick decision: “Scammers” don't like to give you time to think. They will try to pressure you into making a decision by saying things like 'If you don't act now, you'll miss out.'
- You have to give away bank account details: Trustworthy firms will never contact you to ask for this information.

### How can you protect yourself from “scammers”?

#### Be sceptical

First and foremost, remember: If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Don't be afraid to bin it, delete it or hang up.

#### Take your time

Resist pressure to make a decision right away. Contact the Office of Fair Trading on 686500 or ask your MHK for advice. Read the small print and be sure you understand all the terms and conditions of an offer.

#### Know who you're dealing with

Check that the firm or organisation you want to deal with is legitimate and reputable:

- Ask for full contact details, including a street address. A company website should provide the full street address for the business, not just a Post Office or mail box number.
- Contact them using details from their official website or documents. Be wary of buying from anyone who only gives an e-mail address or mobile phone number.
- Put the firm's name into an internet search engine to see what you can find out (although be wary – some “scammers” even go to the trouble of setting up bogus websites).

- All limited companies in the Isle of Man and the UK have to be registered. You can check if the company is registered on the Isle of Man Government Companies Registry website [www.gov.im/ded/pvi](http://www.gov.im/ded/pvi) if they claim to be an Isle of Man business or on UK Companies House [www.companieshouse.gov.uk](http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk) if they claim to be a UK company.
- If you've received a letter or other mailing, you can check through the Direct Marketing Association [www.dma.org.uk](http://www.dma.org.uk) whether it's come from one of its members.
- If you're being offered financial services, find out if the company is registered with the Isle of Man Financial Supervision Authority (FSA) [www.gov.im/fsa](http://www.gov.im/fsa) or if they claim to be a UK company check on the UK Financial Services Authority (FSA) Register [www.fsa.gov.uk](http://www.fsa.gov.uk).
- Don't be fooled by professional-looking websites and marketing materials. "Scammers" are good at making their scams look authentic.

### **Protect your financial information**

- Never give your bank account details to someone you don't know.
- Go to the Card Watch website [www.cardwatch.org.uk](http://www.cardwatch.org.uk) for tips on protecting yourself against credit and debit card fraud.

### **Protect yourself online**

- Follow basic advice for safe online shopping and banking. Have a look at the Get Safe Online website [www.getsafeonline.org.uk](http://www.getsafeonline.org.uk) and the Bank Safe Online website [www.banksafeonline.org.uk](http://www.banksafeonline.org.uk).
- In particular, never e-mail anyone your financial information - even if you do know them.
- If you have given your personal details to a scam website and are now worried your details could be used for criminal reasons, you should report the incident to any police officer.

### **Use a credit card**

Pay by credit card if you can. Under the Consumer Credit Act, you should be entitled to a refund from your card issuer of money lost through fraudulent activity - if the cash price of a single item is over £100.

### **Cut junk mail and calls**

You may wonder where the "scammers" get your contact details from. Lists of names and addresses used for advertising purposes are easily bought and sold. But it is possible to have your details removed from the lists.

To have your name removed from a mail list contact the Mail Preference Service, telephone 020 7291 3310 or visit its website [www.mpsonline.org.uk](http://www.mpsonline.org.uk).

To have your name removed from a telemarketing list contact the Telephone Preference Service, telephone 020 7291 3320 or visit its website [www.tpsonline.org.uk](http://www.tpsonline.org.uk).

To stop junk faxes contact the Facsimile Preference Service, telephone 020 7291 3330 or visit its website [www.fpsonline.org.uk](http://www.fpsonline.org.uk).

### **Ask for advice and report it**

If you suspect you've been the victim of a scam and have lost money don't let embarrassment or fear prevent you from reporting it. Contact your local police station or police headquarters on 631212 or

Action Fraud [www.actionfraud.police.uk/about-us](http://www.actionfraud.police.uk/about-us), Tel: 0300 123 2040

### **Business scams**

Businesses also fall victim to scams. For more information on business scams have a look at the Office of Fair Trading website [www.gov.im/oft/business\\_advice](http://www.gov.im/oft/business_advice).

### **Contact details**

Isle of Man Office of Fair Trading, Thie Slieau Whallian, Foxdale Road, St John's, Isle of Man, IM4 3AS  
Tel: (01624) 686500. E-mail: [iomfairtrading@gov.im](mailto:iomfairtrading@gov.im). Website: [www.gov.im/oft](http://www.gov.im/oft)

Financial Supervision Authority, PO Box 58, Finch Hill House, Bucks Road, Douglas, IM99 1DT.  
Tel: (01624) 689300. E-mail: [fsa@gov.im](mailto:fsa@gov.im). Website: [www.gov.im/fsa](http://www.gov.im/fsa)

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