

Internet Job Offers and Counterfeit Postal Money Orders Can Scam Consumers

You cannot believe your luck! Someone has just offered to **pay you more than the purchase price for merchandise you are selling on the Internet**. All you have to do is accept a postal money order as payment; keep the price of the item and a bit extra as a "gift" for your help; and, wire the remainder of the funds to your customer. Is this deal "Too good to be true?" Or, someone just contacted you via your email account and is offering you a part time job that would hardly interfere with your current work schedule. All you have to do is accept money orders/payment on behalf of a company for goods ordered from them, wire the money to the company and keep a small commission for all your trouble.



The Better Business Bureau warns consumers and businesses to exercise care when approached by eager buyers or companies requesting "help" cashing domestic or international postal money orders. The "buyer/company" often claims to be living in a foreign country. These scam artists target private citizens, small Internet retailers and classified advertisers located in the U.S. Sometimes the scam artists use e-mail and online auctions to perpetrate this fraud; other times, the telephone. In any case, the scammer expresses an interest in purchasing the merchandise, and offers to send a money order through the mail. Or the scammer needs to be paid for products but is located outside the U.S. and ask you to be the middle-man in the transaction. Sometimes the victim is told up front that the money order will be for more than the purchase price and that he or she should keep the extra funds as payment for their assistance. Other times, the "purchaser" claims to have made a mistake and asks the seller to refund the difference. Either way, the victim is told to ship the requested merchandise immediately and to return the "excess funds" – either by wiring them to a bank or person located outside the U.S. or by enclosing them with shipment of the merchandise.

The victim then cashes or deposits the postal money order, assuming the financial document to be legitimate. That is when **they learn that the money order is a fake**. If the money was deposited, the victim's account is debited for the full amount once the bank discovers the money order to be counterfeit. At the very least, the victim loses the merchandise already shipped to the "buyer." In addition, he or she will likely be questioned by bank personnel and other officials about their involvement in the fraud.

Postal money orders have many security features to help verify their legitimacy, according to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. To check that a money order is authentic, hold it up to the light and look for Ben Franklin images repeated on the left side (top to bottom) and a dark security thread running (top to bottom) to the right of the Franklin watermarks, with the tiny letters "USPS" facing backward and forward. If either of these security features is not present, the postal money order is a fake. Also, be aware that denominations appear in two locations. If denomination amounts are discolored, that indicates they have been erased. U.S. Postal money orders are printed on crisp textured paper stock with a maximum value of \$1,000; the maximum value for international postal money orders is \$700.

If you have questions about accepting postal money orders, contact your local Post Office, call the fraud hotline at 1.800.472.8347 or visit www.usps.com/postalinspectors.

The BBB 24/7 Line-
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