

# Hyped

By Bob Osgoodby

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Most of us think of hype as exaggerated or extravagant claims, made especially in advertising or promotional material. Sometimes it is deceptive and deliberately misleading. While we have become a bit immune to this through constant exposure, it always seems that someone comes up with a fresh approach that is not immediately recognized.

Con artists have been around since the beginning of time, and are always willing to take advantage of another "hot prospect". But every scam has "red flags" and a little common sense should prevail so you do not fall prey to them. Let's examine a few we get by email everyday.

"Complimentary Vacation Package" - this one has been around a long time, but has now found its way to the web. It starts off with "Congratulations! You will be our guest in Orlando, Florida, home of Walt Disney World, for 4 days and 3 nights. All compliments of major Vacation Resort Developers." Reading it, you might feel you have won a contest. In actuality, this is not the case. It is a high pressure sales campaign designed to sell you a "timeshare" vacation package.

Another variation promises deeply discounted vacation packages. You pay for a package that seems great on the surface, but in reality is either third rate accommodations or doesn't exist at all.

"Guaranteed Winner" - they state - "You're going to get one of these top five prizes, guaranteed!" In this scam you normally send some information, and either return it by email or fill out a form on a web site. They require that you supply your telephone number to be eligible. You will then be contacted by a telemarketer who confirms that you have been chosen for one of the five "valuable" prizes; however, you must pay a processing fee for handling, customs duties or taxes, and you must send a check or money order to them by overnight mail. The prize usually winds up being small trinkets of minimal value, discount coupons or vouchers, worth far less than what you paid.

Or, you might receive an e-mail informing you that your order has been received and processed, and your credit card will be billed for the charges. The trouble is, you haven't ordered anything. They contacted you using bulk email, using inactive return addresses which prevent you from refuting the orders by email. They do provide a telephone number in the area code 767, which is actually in the West Indies. They try to keep callers on the line as long as possible, and you are reportedly billed as much as \$25 per minute. Be aware that your local telephone company may bill for services provided by other companies, and not be able to provide you relief.

Another current scam floating about the web offers you a cut of stolen money from Nigeria that was stolen and they need your help getting the money out of the country. They of course want a cut of

the money that they claim will be wired to your personal bank account. You of course are expected to pay them their share up front. The money however never arrives in your bank.

One group sends hundreds of thousands of unsolicited emails to people directing them to web sites promoting the Mega\$Nets and MegaResource programs. When you visit one of their web sites you can download copies of the software program which contains a list of five names and addresses. The software program and web sites direct you to send twenty dollars to each of five people listed in the software in order for you to get yourself placed at the top of the list of names. This is simply a variation of the old fashioned chain letter. Actually, there are a lot of chain letters floating about the web and all should be avoided.

Another email promises guaranteed Credit Card approval! One group offered Visa cards to the credit-challenged "to put you back in the mainstream of financial life in high style" at an interest rate of only 4.9%. How? Through the magic of using offshore banks in tax haven countries. There is however a \$100 processing fee and \$25 per month charge regardless of use.

Some people really believe that they have been selected to be in the Internet Version of "Who's Who". This one started years ago and was sent to every company executive in the country - They will include your listing at no charge - oh, would you like a copy? "Send \$98 to us and it will be delivered to your doorstep."

There is no way to adequately cover all the scams that permeate the web. Before jumping into any of these "make a million while you sleep" plans, use a little "due diligence" and check them out. The money you save will be your own.

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