

## **Don't Be a Victim of Social Media Coupon Con Artists**

The Coupon Information Center (CIC) has been reviewing a number of social media channels for over a year. We have found that most people are honest and want to enjoy legitimate opportunities to save money. However, there are numerous con artists preying on consumers by exploiting their savings goals. Fortunately, consumers can enjoy great coupon savings while protecting themselves from con artists by following three simple tips:

1. Never pay money for coupons.
2. Avoid secret/closed/private groups and accounts.
3. Be aware that coupon decoding/balanced couponing is theft.

### **Never Pay Money for Coupons**

Fraud becomes more prevalent when money is involved. Here are a few things readers should be aware of.

- ✓ Individuals selling coupons, especially so-called “early inserts,” are often selling stolen property.
- ✓ So called “IP Fairies” have used computer hacking techniques to obtain more Internet Print-at-Home coupons than they were legally entitled to. These coupons were then sold to consumers who were unaware of the illegal methods used to obtain the coupons. IP Fairies and their customers may be the subject of lawsuits or other enforcement actions.
- ✓ Coupon sellers claiming that they are selling a service, and not the coupons themselves, are simply attempting to deceive you.
- ✓ There are no legal sources for large numbers of free product coupons. Such sellers are selling either counterfeit or stolen coupons.

Some industry participants have been forced to stop distributing coupons in certain markets due to the massive theft of their coupons caused by coupon sellers. This hurts honest consumers and local newspapers, ultimately putting people out of work.

### **Avoid Secret/Closed/Private Groups and Accounts**

Legitimate information about coupons is readily available from multiple sources, including bloggers, industry websites, and other public sources. We have observed that secret/closed/private social media channels frequently participate in or promote illegal activities. We are not aware of a single coupon issuing manufacturer that distributes real coupons via a “secret” group.

If you have inadvertently become involved with a secret social media group, please do not confront them. Be especially cautious if they have posted “coupons” in their group or are offering to sell free product coupons. Instead, please contact your local law enforcement authority or the CIC.

### **Be Aware that Coupon Decoding/Balanced Couponing is Theft**

Individuals who intentionally use coupons on products other than as intended by the written language in the terms and conditions printed on the coupons are committing fraud, also known as theft by deception.

Finally, consumers should understand that there is a great deal of misinformation about coupons on social media and that con artists are not above engaging in lies and deception to take your money.

All consumers should be able to enjoy coupon and other promotion related savings in a crime free, safe environment. Following these guidelines will greatly reduce the chance readers will fall victim to coupon criminals.