

JOB OFFERS THAT DON'T AD UP

With unemployment levels at near-record lows, newspaper and internet classified sections around the country are bursting with promising opportunities for job seekers.



But there are traps buried among the genuine dream jobs—scammers masquerading as employers and misleading ads that don't deliver all they promise.

The ACCC has become aware of a growing number of bogus job ads in employment sections of websites and newspapers; and recently released an updated version of its guide, *Misleading job and business opportunity ads and how to handle them*.

Scams reported to the ACCC range from training promising a guaranteed position on completion to work-from-home schemes, promising thousands of dollars a month for basic work, such as filling envelopes.

While many scams are easy to spot, some of the current misleading job ads have found insidious new techniques for catching out the unwary.

A particularly predatory scheme that came to light recently advertised sales and marketing opportunities at attractive pay and conditions for students and pensioners. Those unlucky enough to have dialled the 0055 phone number for further details discovered, after several minutes of salesman's talk, that there was no job and their call had been charged at \$4.95 a minute. Many newspapers now refuse to run job ads that carry a 0055 or 1900 premium service phone number.

Publishers are required under the Trade Practices Act and the mirror state and territory fair trading legislation not to publish job advertisements that could mislead the public. While most take this responsibility seriously, it is impossible for a publisher to weed out every advertisement that may, on closer inspection, turn out to be less than it promises.



This makes it vital for those reading the ads to be aware of the traps and ensure they don't get caught out.

There are several key signs that can indicate a job is not what it seems:

Guaranteed income

Some commission-only positions promise a guaranteed income, which doesn't make sense because the salary earned is a percentage of the sales made. Therefore, if no sales are made in a month, logic would suggest the income will be zero as well.

Self-employment or work-from-home business opportunities

While the lure of becoming your own boss can be an attractive proposition for many job seekers, advertisements offering successful self-employment systems can actually be a call for investment. This can include pyramid selling schemes or other similar 'self-employment' models which require the purchase of stocks or other investment, which is not always clear from the outset.

Full training provided

Advertisements for training services can mischievously find their way into the 'positions vacant' column, thinly disguised as a genuine job. While many such advertisements promise a guaranteed position on completion, they often don't spell out how much an applicant will have to pay for the training and what the job at the end will entail. They can simply be well-worded ways to convince a job seeker to pay for a position that doesn't exist and training they don't need.

Wide range of positions vacant

Advertisements that don't specify what the actual position on offer is can in fact be recruitment consultants trying to increase the number of job seekers on their books—there may be no job at all.

Easy money, simple work

Positions that advertise high rates of pay for simple, usually home-based work are generally a con. They often call for a small 'fee' of usually \$25 for an information or starter kit. Once the money is sent, the company—like your money—disappears. Using a

post box instead of a street address makes it easy for the scammers to remain anonymous and is a good sign to readers of an ad that they should be wary.

The best advice is to be alert, ask questions and check with the ACCC or your local office of Fair Trading if you believe a job advertisement is misleading. An 18-member Australasian Consumer Fraud Taskforce comprising Commonwealth, state, territory and New Zealand government agencies targeted scams during Scam Awareness Month, which ran until 13 March. For more details or to report a scam, visit www.scamwatch.gov.au or call the dedicated hotline on 1300 795 995.