



Department of Commerce

WA ScamNet



Online free trial offers

Whether it's a sponsored post in your social media feed or a pop up advertisement while you're browsing the web, offers of 'free trials' or 'samples' are a common sight for internet users.

But you know the age-old saying 'there's no such thing as a free lunch'. Well WA ScamNet's research into these offers certainly backs that theory up.

Here's a typical case study:

- Consumer Protection receives a complaint regarding unauthorised credit or debit card transactions.
- The consumer has signed up for a 'free trial' or 'free sample' of a product while they were online.
- They were lured by an advert boasting promises such as weight loss by taking pills without exercise; muscle-building protein powders; teeth whitening gels; age-defying face creams; herbal medicines or natural remedies to cure health issues.
- They had to pay a small fee e.g. \$9.99 for postage/shipping and handling and this involved supplying their credit or debit card details.
- After receiving their free trial or sample, they have received extra deliveries of the product without requesting it and their bank statement shows that they have been charged.
- WA ScamNet checks the terms and conditions and finds that the fine print states that unless the consumer makes contact to cancel a proposed subscription they will be sent and charged for further full-priced supplies.

"Should you fail to call us on 1234-567-890 or email us at xxxx@xxxx.xxx within 21 days of subscribing to your free trial, you will be sent a 30-day supply every month thereafter until you advise us of your wish to cancel arrangement."

- Sometimes the business is based internationally and very difficult to contact because of the time difference and overseas contact points.
- It is unlikely the consumer's credit card issuer will provide a chargeback because the transaction is not necessarily fraudulent – the consumer has agreed to it.

WA ScamNet recommendations:

- **Think before you click** – don't be enticed by bold claims such as "fat-busting", "miracle cure" or incredible "before and after" photos.



- **Research the name of the website and product.** Typing the name followed by the words ‘rip off’ or ‘scam’ into you search engine is a good way to look for negative information. You could find there is no scientific evidence to back up what’s promoted or fake photos may have been used; the website might even be bogus!
- **Watch out for hidden terms and conditions** that lock you into an ongoing supply of the product. Always read any fine print you are agreeing to.
- **Beware of pre-ticked subscription sign-up boxes** – uncheck them.
- **Make an appointment in your diary to cancel** if you decide to go ahead with a free trial despite the subscription terms and conditions.
- **Keep an eye on bank statements** if you have supplied your credit or debit card details, to make sure there are no unauthorised deductions.

Online free trials that cost aren’t just an issue for Australians. We like this warning from the [US Federal Trade Commission](#)

You can spread the word by sharing this WA ScamNet alert among your friends and family.

Submitted by: Ruth Edge – Cardinia Shire Council