

# ★ JOIN THE FIGHT ★

Suffolk Consumer Champion

## Weekly Bulletin

14/07/2017

### This week's top features



#### **Fake Pet Adverts**

The National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB) and Action Fraud have recently noticed a rise in the reporting of pets, and in particular puppies and kittens, being advertised for sale via popular online auction websites.

The fraudsters will place an advert of the pet for sale, often claiming that the pet is currently held somewhere less accessible or overseas. Upon agreement of a sale, the suspect will usually request an advance payment by money transfer or bank transfer. However, the pet does not materialise and the fraudster will subsequently ask for further advanced payments for courier charges, shipping fees and additional transportation costs. Even if further payments are made, the pet will still not materialise as it is likely to not exist.

#### **Tips to staying safe when purchasing pets:**

- Stay within auction guidelines.
- Be cautious if the seller initially requests payment via one method, but later claims that due to 'issues with their account' they will need to take the payment via an alternative method such as a bank transfer.
- Consider conducting research on other information provided by the seller, for example a mobile phone number or email address used by the seller could alert you to any negative information associated with the number/email address online.
- Request details of the courier company being used and consider researching it.
- Agree a suitable time to meet face-to-face to agree the purchase and to collect the pet. If the seller is reluctant to meet then it could be an indication that the pet does not exist.
- A genuine seller should be keen to ensure that the pet is going to a caring and loving new home. If the seller does not express any interest in you and the pet's new home, be wary.
- If you think the purchase price is too good to be true then it probably is, especially if the pet is advertised as a pure-breed.
- Do not be afraid to request copies of the pet's inoculation history, breed paperwork and certification prior to agreeing a sale. If the seller is reluctant or unable to provide this information it could be an indication that either the pet does not exist or the pet has been illegally bred e.g. it originates from a 'puppy farm'. A 'puppy farm' is a commercial dog breeding enterprise where the sole aim is to maximise profit for the least investment. Commercial dog breeders must be registered with their local authority and undergo regular inspections to ensure that the puppies are bred responsibly and are in turn fit and healthy. Illegally farmed puppies will often be kept in inadequate conditions and are more likely to suffer from ailments and illnesses associated with irresponsible breeding.
- When thinking of buying a pet, consider buying them in person from rescue centres or from reputable breeders.
- If you have been affected by this, or any other type of fraud, report it to Action Fraud by visiting [www.actionfraud.police.uk](http://www.actionfraud.police.uk) or by calling 0300 123 2040.



### **Rogues Going Door-to-Door**

We have the following rogue trader reports that we would be grateful if you could share with friends, family and colleagues:

- Individual reported going door to door in Ipswich, dropping off a leaflet asking to buy collectables, then If you are considering selling any items, please get them valued by an independent expert so that you are true value.
- Individuals calling at properties in Holbrook, Brantham, Ufford and Great Waldringfield, claiming to be "ex-offenders". Do not deal with them and report them to Suffolk Police on 101.
- Cold callers in Trimley trying to change your energy supplier & pressurising for bank details.
- Individuals in a van going door-to-door in Ipswich selling generators.
- Trader reported going door to door in Mildenhall stating work is needed on the resident's roof & offering to repair it.

If you are approached at the door by a trader, do not deal with them and instead carry out research on any work you are considering having done, or any product you are considering purchasing.

Please report doorstep callers to Trading Standards via Citizens Advice Consumer Service on 03454 040506.



### **Holiday Fraud Warning**

The average amount lost per person to holiday fraud last year was approximately £1,200, but losses are not just financial; they can also have an impact on health. Over a quarter (26%) of victims say that the fraud had also had a significant impact on their health or financial well-being. Most worryingly of all, 259 people said the impact on them was severe, meaning that they had to receive medical treatment or were at risk of bankruptcy. The most common types of holiday fraud relate to the sale of airline tickets, booking accommodation online as well as timeshare sales.

### **Types of holiday booking fraud**

In 2016, 5,826 cases of holiday booking fraud were reported to Action Fraud. The most common types of fraud related to:

- Holiday accommodation: Fraudsters are making full use of the internet to con holidaymakers by setting

up fake websites, hacking into legitimate accounts and posting fake adverts on websites and social media.

- **Airline tickets:** where a customer believes they are booking a flight and receives a fake ticket or pays for a ticket that never turns up. In 2016, flights to Africa and the Indian sub-continent were particularly targeted, suggesting that fraudsters are targeting the visiting friends and family market and may well be making use of lack of knowledge of the strict regulations in place for the legitimate UK based travel industry.
- **Sports and religious trips:** a popular target for fraud due to limited availability of tickets and consequently higher prices.
- **Timeshares and holiday clubs:** The sums involved with this form of fraud are particularly high with victims often losing tens of thousands of pounds each.

In common with previous years, the numbers of people reporting travel fraud to the police jumps in the summer and in December. This is a very clear indication that fraudsters are targeting the most popular travel periods. Customers may be particularly vulnerable in 2017 as the overseas travel industry is reporting good early booking levels with accommodation and flights at a premium. Fraudsters could take advantage of this by offering "good deals" over the summer. These will then fail to materialise, leaving people out of pocket and with either no flights or nowhere to stay.

#### **Top tips to avoid becoming a travel fraud victim:**

- **Stay safe online:** Check the web address is legitimate and has not been altered by slight changes to a domain name - such as going from .co.uk to .org
- **Do your research:** Don't just rely on one review - do a thorough online search to check the company's credentials. If a company is defrauding people there is a good chance that consumers will post details of their experiences, and warnings about the company.
- **Look for the logo:** Check whether the company is a member of a recognised trade body such as ABTA. If you have any doubts, you can verify membership of ABTA online, at [www.abta.com](http://www.abta.com).
- **Pay safe:** Be cautious if you're asked to pay directly into a private individual's bank account. Paying by direct bank transfer is like paying by cash - the money is very difficult to trace and is not refundable. Wherever possible, pay by credit card or a debit card.
- **Check paperwork:** You should study receipts, invoices as well as terms and conditions. Be very wary of any companies that don't provide any at all. When booking through a Holiday Club or Timeshare, get the contract thoroughly vetted by a solicitor before signing up.
- **Use your instincts:** If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- **Get free expert advice:** For further advice on how to stay safe when booking or researching travel online, go to [Get Safe Online](#).

[Product Recalls](#)

[Fraud and Scam Advice](#)

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