

Thursday June 22, 2006

## HIGH TECH SCAMS HIT SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Consumer Affairs Minister Jennifer Rankine has issued a warning to consumers to be wary of new electronic tactics being used by scam artists – who are using old scams but adapting them with the use of technology.

The **Office of Consumer and Business Affairs** (OCBA) has received multiple reports from consumers about two scams that are infiltrating South Australia presently:

- David Rhodes-style chain letter scam which has reverted to passing letters via email; and
- An SMS dating scam whereby consumers are invited to “unsubscribe” via a web address.

“Scammers are ripping off unsuspecting consumers and are using technology to catch people out,” says Ms Rankine.

“South Australians need to be on their toes about offers which appear too good to be true.”

The David Rhodes-style chain letter now involves people receiving emails offering them ways to make money using pyramid scheme-like methods.

Supposed testimonials from people claiming they are making more than \$200 a day are being emailed, along with instructions to forward the email to numerous other people, after sending \$5 via **PayPal** to the first email address on the list.

**PayPal** is a legitimate electronic payment system used widely for online financial transactions.

“They take money from people and deliver nothing to them in return,” says Ms Rankine.

“OCBA has also received reports from consumers who are receiving unsolicited text messages on their mobile telephones stating that they have subscribed to a dating service and will be charged \$2 per day unless they contact a website and unsubscribe.”

People have expressed genuine concern that they may have unwittingly subscribed to this dating service and attempt to deregister by following instructions on the **Irreal Host** website ([www.irrealhost.com](http://www.irrealhost.com)).

As soon as consumers place their details on the website, their computer appears to be infected with a virus.

These unsolicited SMS / Internet scam seems to have originated from overseas, and started hitting mobile phone users in South Australia during the Queen’s Birthday long weekend.

Consumers who have “unsubscribed” via the website may be left with a Trojan virus, putting them at risk that personal information including banking details stored on the computer may be forwarded to the fraudsters.”

“I want to remind people that these are unsolicited SMS messages. This means that you have not formally made any arrangement with the sender, so you do not need to unsubscribe to the service,” says the Minister.

**“If you respond, you are being hoodwinked. The best advice is to ignore the SMS message and delete it.”**

**“South Australians should remember if the offer sounds too good to be true, then it probably is.”**

Consumers can check the Scams Alert section of the OCBA website for information about rip-off schemes in circulation in Australia. OCBA also has a brochure available called ‘Little Black Book of Scams’ advising consumers how to recognise and avoid scams.

For a copy of the brochure, or to report a suspected scam, contact OCBA’s Consumer Affairs Branch on (08) 8204 9777 or 131 882 for country callers. Further information is also available at [www.ocba.sa.gov.au](http://www.ocba.sa.gov.au)

For further information contact David Heath on 0422 004 439
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