

Canadian contests: Enter to win big rewards from retailers in Canada!

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Wednesday, 09 May 2007

I love contests! Over the years I've won a lot of different prizes - from big to small. There was a great week-long trip for my family to Disneyland in California; a top-of-the-line barbecue that cooked great steaks for more than 20 years; and most recently a fabulous 40-inch flat-panel LCD television worth big bucks from Pepsi Canada. But make sure you don't fall for the fake contests - either online or on paper.

Legitimate contests great way to win super prizes in Canada

Real contests are a fantastic way for Canadians to win free goodies. But don't fall for the scams that use 'contests' as a pretext to steal your money, sell you a vacuum or convince you to join a gym. I will give you some tips to avoid the fakes and hopefully win at the real ones.

Contest scams to avoid - the red flag warnings

So how do you steer clear of the bad contests? Here's some of the red flags to watch out:

Any direct solicitations by mail, email or ballot box should be a warning to you!

We've all received unsolicited postcards via Canada Post claiming we've won free vacations in Florida, fitness club memberships or some other exciting household items like TVs and steak knives. There's always a sense of urgency. The 'prize' will be forfeited if you don't call within a limited amount of time. Simple rule - don't respond! You haven't won anything. There is always a catch!

These flashy postcards are distributed by thousands, even millions, in Canada and the United States of America. If 'everyone' was a winner, these snake-oil companies would quickly go out of business. What you've really won if you call the hotline phone number is an outrageous "900" charge on your telephone bill, or a high pressure presentation to sign a long-term expensive membership at the fitness centre or a smooth-talking sales pitch in your home from a vacuum salesperson.

You're best off to simply shun these hucksters by shredding any flyers that arrive unsolicited. It will save you lots of time and plenty of money. These same scams show up in your inbox. Just the other day, I apparently 'won' millions in the Yahoo Lottery (sic). Woohoo!

(By the way misspellings and poor grammar are usually BIG RED FLAGS. Legitimate companies have huge marketing departments that carefully comb their promotional materials for spelling mistakes and grammatical errors).

Hardly a day goes by that another email is declaring me a winner in one of many national lotteries (usually based overseas in the UK). Don't respond! Period.

These scam artists are hoping to squeeze 'administrative fees' out of innocent victims. Once you send any money, they come up with 'taxes', 'surcharges' and other 'bills' that need to be paid before they can send your winnings. Of course, there is no national lottery, and no winners - only losers, who often exhaust their life savings chasing these fraudulent sweepstakes schemes.

And finally, we've all seen the ballot boxes in restaurants and retail stores advertising various contests. If it's not a contest run by the actual establishment, it's usually a scheme to lure people to high-pressure sales presentations for lengthy fitness club memberships, costly vacuum cleaners or expensive time-share vacation plans. (Check out the warnings offered by this government website).

You can't win if you don't enter - but never pay any money

Of course, this is different than eateries offering a free lunch using business card draws, or retailers trying to grow their customers lists using prizes as a lure for your personal information. These contests are usually an easy way to win a complimentary meal or nice door prize.

It's actually the way we won our first barbecue from our local grocery store several decades ago. It got me hooked on contests. I had stuffed the large Plexiglas barrel with hundreds of entries. The following week, the store manager called to let me know I had won! It was a great moment. I knew I wanted to win more.

On a business trip, waiting for a plane one day, I had time at the airport to fill out a hundred or so ballots for a trip to Disneyland. I won that vacation of a lifetime for four people. My family has a great time in Los Angeles all-expenses paid. It does make the vacation so much sweeter when it's free.

Of course, the Internet has changed the business of contests. Many websites offer prizes. Again you need to take extra care to make sure the promotional offer is legitimate.

We've all encountered pop-ups that promise us a free iPod, Walmart gift card, or prepaid credit card if we just click through and complete a 'simple' survey or application. Unfortunately, just like those flashy postcards, these flash pop-up windows promise much more than they ever deliver.

You will need to provide lots of personal information, through page after page of offers, in fact dozens of solicitations for credit cards, home loans, 'high-paying' jobs, magazines, etc. Clicking your way past this barrage of come-ons finally gets you to the meat of the matter. You will have to sign up for at least two offers from participating firms to get your hands on that free iPod. And of course that means you have to commit to spending some money in order to get this allegedly free iPod. Not worth the time, money or effort.

Legitimate free contests in Canada - no purchase ever necessary

So what contests do I enter then? Check out CanadaContests.com for some great legitimate Canadian contests. They have a great list of current contests available to residents of Canada. From cash to cars, vacations to spas, and lots in between, Canadians can win some great prizes from companies looking to build customer loyalty and market branding through contest promotions. You can't win if you don't enter!

The reason I love contests in Canada. They remain one of the last true freebies. By law you can enter any legitimate Canadian contest without purchase. In fact, no purchase is necessary ... ever - no matter how big or small the contest prize. Even better in Canada, unlike the USA, you pay no income taxes on any prizes you win. I know I shouldn't be telling you my contest secrets. I don't really need the competition. But good luck anyway!