

Beware of Get-Rich Scams on Twitter

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We all want to get rich quick from the comfort of our own homes. But not even the magic of Twitter makes that possible.

With the good inevitably comes the bad. Sometimes I feel like a one-woman social-media-promoting band, telling friends, family and colleagues about the joys and benefits of using Twitter. I still feel that way — using Twitter has been beneficial for my business, and the only investment has been my time.

That said, Twitter now seems to be attracting an increasing number of scammers, charlatans, and get-rich-quickers. This week the Better Business Bureau (BBB) warned “job hunters” and budding entrepreneurs looking to start home-based businesses to be wary of the promises on Twitter touting how you can “make lots of money from the comfort of home.” The BBB said, “The large print for such offers may promise big returns but the fine print can cost [you] every month.”

The BBB called out companies like Make-money-on-twitter.com and TwitterProfitHouse.com, which bill unsuspecting consumers in perpetuity until they cancel the programs. According to *Consumer Reports*, “A spokesperson for TwitterProfitHouse.com claims it’s not running a scam, since all the details of the business are outlined in the terms and conditions, which is available for all to see. Since the BBB’s announcement, TwitterProfitHouse.com has temporarily stopped the marketing of its CDs.”

Another company spotlighted by the BBB was EasyTweetProfits.com, which “claims you can make \$250-\$873 a day working at home with Twitter. The Web site offers a seven-day free trial of their instructional CD-ROM for \$1.95 to cover shipping. Buried in the lengthy terms and conditions are the details that the trial begins on the day the CD is ordered — not when it is received — and if the consumer doesn’t cancel within seven days of signing up, they’ll be charged \$47 every month.”

Some of these messages were spread via e-mail, while others were offered on Twitter itself. Clicking links in the e-mails or Tweets could, according to the BBB, lead consumers directly to scam sites or cause them to inadvertently install malware onto their computers.

Getting rich the quick and easy way is not a new lure of course. Twitter is just the newest way to spread the word. As the BBB’s Steve Cox says, “Twitter is the newest bright shiny object online and a perfect hook for yet another work-at-home scheme.”

The BBB says to look out for “phony blogs by made-up individuals,” which seem like testimonials to the success of Twitter-money-making programs. One clue is seeing the exact same tweet touting the program posted by many different Twitterers.

But these seemingly obvious ploys are not the only come-ons to be aware of on Twitter. There are a number of people, some of whom have thousands and thousands of followers (I call them Twitter celebrities), who seem to be making their living enticing others to use “their unique system” to make a living. On the Mashable blog, Bernard Moon, vice president of the Lunsford Group, a private holding company, calls these come-ons Straight Cons. You’ll recognize some of the language — and the promises. Take your choice. You can make hundreds of thousands a month or over \$100,000 in six weeks or direct massive traffic to your Web site, or go from bankrupt to multimillionaire in seven seconds. Ok, I made that last one up, but you get the idea.

This is a vulnerable time for a lot of entrepreneurs. We’re strapped for cash and the lure of easy money can be attractive. And for those of you thinking about starting a business, the temptation can be even greater. So whether you see the message on Twitter or elsewhere, please remember that anything that claims you can make a lot of money without putting out much effort is a lie. The only way to make millions overnight is by winning the lottery (and you know what the odds of that are). The people who promise you endless, ongoing wealth by following their “proven system” are the only ones who will likely get wealthy.

There is no easy path to success, entrepreneurial or otherwise. Owning a business is going to be the hardest work you ever do. So while it’s an old canard, in times like these it bears repeating — “If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.”