

## **Scams Awareness Month campaign strategy**

### **Campaign duration:**

**Tuesday 1 February to Monday 28 February 2011**

### **Summary**

Consumers losing money to scams is a significant problem in the UK. Scams can take the form of bogus and fraudulent offers sent by post, telephone, email or text.

Mass marketed scams such as fake lottery and prize draw wins, bogus psychic predictions, and miracle health cures are some of the tricks used by scammers. Fake ticket websites and bogus holiday clubs are also used to con people. Although anyone can fall for a scam, the elderly and vulnerable are more likely to be targeted, as they are more likely to become repeat victims.

Nearly half of the UK population has been targeted by a scam. More than three million adults – 6.5 per cent of the UK population – fall victim to scams, losing a total of £3.5 billion every year.

We believe it is vital that consumers are able to recognise and reject scams. The Office of Fair Trading's scams awareness campaign run in partnership with local authority Trading Standards Services (TSS) and other key players, aims to increase awareness and understanding of scams to reduce the number of scam victims.

Scams awareness month 2011 will consist of three themes: Scamnesty, holiday clubs and ticket scams.

### **Background**

#### **Corporate objectives/policy**

The term 'scam' is not precisely defined. It is often used by complainants in relation to the whole spectrum of practices from criminal fraud (which may or may not be linked to international organised crime) through knowingly

deceptive practices, to a small trader who makes an honest mistake (for example, by banking a cheque but forgetting to process the order).

Many scams are well-organised and involve companies based overseas in territories where investigation and prosecution is difficult. The UK's enforcement community cannot deal with all scams, but aims to work with our counterparts overseas to reduce the negative impact of scams on consumers and markets. The OFT has a current initiative to improve e-protection, in which context we will give consideration to certain types of online scams.

Mass marketed scams cause approximately £3.5 billion of detriment to UK consumers every year (Research on impact of mass marketed scams, OFT883, December 2006). In addition, the psychological impact of scams can seriously damage individual consumers' trust in markets. Previous research (an online survey of 3,000 UK consumers conducted in August 2009 for the Just Tick It scams campaign) found that one in twelve people admitted to having been the victim of a ticket scam, and that about half of consumers had at some point been targeted by a mass marketed scam (Research on impact of mass marketed scams, OFT883, December 2006).

The OFT defines a mass marketed scam as: 'A misleading or deceptive business practice where you receive an unsolicited or uninvited contact and false promises are made to con you out of your money'. Types include: Prize draw/sweepstake scams, foreign lottery scams, miracle health cure scams, vehicle matching scams, and working from home scams.

Scams are often targeted specifically at vulnerable or disadvantaged consumers, such as those already in debt. These consumers can suffer disproportionate levels of harm as a result of mass marketed and other scams.

Mass marketing of scams continues to increase as technology allows greater pinpointing of potential victims, and online transactions grow as a proportion of markets. The continued existence of scams online is a potential obstacle to growth in consumer confidence of online markets.

When consumers report scams to Consumer Direct this information is shared with the full range of UK enforcers including the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA), Serious Fraud Office (SFO) and the Met Police, as well as the OFT and local authority Trading Standards Services (TSS). Each

of these enforcers considers action in appropriate cases. Where mass marketed scams originate from overseas, SOCA and the OFT work closely with overseas counterparts to tackle the worst perpetrators.

## **Communications**

Communication is an important and effective tool that helps to reduce the number of scam victims via consumer education and awareness raising campaigns. We can do this through general awareness work but also through targeted alerts and specific campaigns, often timed to coincide with seasonal or current problem areas, such as music festival tickets in the summer.

Communication also works alongside disruption and enforcement action, for example, investigating and prosecuting scammers, to reduce the harmful effects on consumers.

Previous scams awareness month campaigns, for example, Scamnesty, have successfully run during February since 2008, in partnership with local authority Trading Standards Services (TSS).

Scams awareness month is also the OFT's contribution to the international initiative 'Fraud Prevention Month', organised by the International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network (ICPEN), of which the OFT is a member.

## **Campaign overview**

Scams awareness month 2011 will comprise the following themes:

Weeks one to four: Scamnesty

Week three: Ticket scams – Just Tick It

Week four: Bogus holiday clubs

### **Scamnesty**

Scamnesty has successfully run since February 2008 in partnership with TSS. TSS place Scamnesty bins in their local communities and encourage consumers to collect their scam mailings and deposit them to raise awareness of mass marketed scam types and issues, for example,

clairvoyant/psychic, prize draws/sweepstakes, lotteries, miracle health cures.

The OFT would like to build on the success of last year's activity and propose that Scamnesty runs for a third time during February 2011.

Scamnesty will run throughout the month, with initial media warnings raising general awareness of the various types of scams that exist. OFT, however, will use the third and fourth weeks of scams awareness month to focus on two specific themes - bogus holiday clubs and ticket scams - to help maintain media momentum throughout the month and maximise audience impact and reach.

### **Bogus holiday clubs**

For an initial charge, consumers can join an exclusive club offering special rates or discounts on flights, accommodation and other services. Some of these are bogus holiday clubs. That is, what you have been told you are purchasing can be very different from the contract you sign. OFT's research (Research on impact of mass marketed scams, OFT883, December 2006) found that bogus holiday club scams cost the UK public an estimated £1.17 billion each year, with a mean loss of £3,030 per victim.

The EU Timeshare, Long-term Holiday Products, Resale and Exchange Contracts Directive 2008 was adopted in February 2009 and replaces the Timeshare Directive 1994. European Member States have until 23 February 2011 to introduce national legislation to comply with the directive. In the UK, the directive will be transposed by the proposed Timeshare, Holiday Products, Resale and Exchange Contracts Regulations 2010, replacing the Timeshare Act 1992 and subsequent regulations.

The new directive increases consumer protection by widening scope to include holiday clubs, timeshare resale and timeshare-like products. This provides a timely opportunity to increase awareness of bogus holiday clubs in general and the benefits to consumers of the new regulations.

### **Ticket scams - Just Tick It**

In the run up to events such as pop/rock concerts and festivals, there are many opportunities for scammers to target consumers. For example, fake

(fraudulent) ticketing websites claim to sell event tickets that are never delivered, leaving fans without tickets and their money.

The last week of scams awareness month in February is timely for raising awareness of ticket scams, as tickets for such as V Festival go on sale in March 2011.

## **Strategic objective**

To reduce consumer detriment by increasing consumers' knowledge of scams, their ability to identify them, and to resist the persuasive tactics used by scammers.

## **Communication objectives**

### **Scamnesty**

- Increase awareness of mass marketed scams nationally.
- Work in partnership with and support TSS to deliver Scamnesty and wider scams messages locally.
- Increase awareness of scam reporting via the online 'Report a Scam' function on Consumer Direct's website.

### **Bogus holiday clubs**

- Increase awareness of bogus holiday clubs.
- Inform consumers of the new protection offered by the Timeshare, Holiday Products, Resale and Exchange Contracts Regulations 2010.
- Increase unique visitors to the holiday clubs section of the Consumer Direct website.

### **Just Tick It**

- Increase awareness of online ticketing scams.
- Help consumers identify fake ticketing websites.
- Increase the number of unique visitors to the Just Tick It fake website ([www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/tickets](http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/tickets)) and ticketing scams section of the Consumer Direct website.
- Increase awareness of scam reporting via the online 'Report a Scam' function on Consumer Direct's website.

## Primary target audiences

### Scamnesty

- UK consumers in all socio economic groups.  
However, greater targeting emphasis will be placed on vulnerable consumers such as the elderly and their intermediaries such as friends, family, and neighbours.

### Bogus holiday clubs

- UK consumers aged 35 + in all socio economic groups.

### Just Tick It

- Younger event ticket buyers aged 16 to 25 years and older buyers aged 30 to 45 years in all socio economic groups.

## Key messages

### Scamnesty

- Scams are smart. Prove you're smarter. Bin them.
- If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- Pass on the warnings. Tell your friends and family if you discover a scam.
- Your actions may help protect others from becoming a scam victim.
- If you are unsure of an offer, speak to family or friends, and seek advice from Consumer Direct on 08454 04 05 06 or visit [www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/scams](http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/scams)
- Report scams to: [www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/reportascam](http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/reportascam)

### Bogus holiday clubs

- Some holiday clubs are reputable but there are a lot of bogus ones out there that make exaggerated claims about their product.
- If you are approached by a scratchcard tout or pressured to attend a presentation while on holiday think about:
  - Whether you really want to sit through a lengthy sales pitch?
  - What is the salesperson offering? Have they overpromised? Do you know exactly what you are getting for your money?

- Avoid pressure to sign a contract at the presentation. Insist on taking away the contract to consider at your leisure
- Consumers are entitled to a 14-day cooling off period after signing up to a holiday club in European Member States.
- If you have signed up for a holiday club and need further advice, contact Consumer Direct on 08454 04 05 06 or visit [www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/holidayclubs](http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/holidayclubs)

### **Just Tick It**

- One in 12 people is scammed by fake ticket websites. Don't be one of them. Before you buy, check it.
- Watch out for fake ticketing websites. There are lots of legitimate websites but scammers make it difficult to spot a fake.
- Don't let them con you. Ask yourself: How can this website guarantee tickets to an event that is already sold out, or that are not on sale yet?
- Never buy event tickets from a website you're unsure of. Ask others about it and search online for comments.
- You can 'tick off' a number of things to look out before purchasing your tickets online by visiting our fake ticket website: [www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/tickets](http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/tickets)
- Report fake ticketing websites or suspected ones to: [www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/reportascam](http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/reportascam)

### **Tactics**

#### **Campaign budget: £50k**

Due to the current central government marketing freeze, the budget for this campaign is restricted to £50k. Therefore free marketing channels will be mainly used, for example, free PR and social media. Partner organisations will also be used to disseminate key messages.

#### **Weeks one to four: Scamnesty**

Scamnesty bins are the focal point of the campaign. Participating TSS should place bins in their local communities and encourage consumers to collect their scam mailings and deposit them. This helps to raise awareness by engaging consumers in their local areas, encouraging people to talk about the issues and to engage others, for example, friends, families and neighbours.

The OFT will produce a campaign resource pack, posters, bin stickers, and the Scambuster (OFT831) consumer information booklet to support the campaign. TSS should develop their own promotional initiatives and generate PR in their local media. For example, teenage school children could be encouraged to participate in an event to raise awareness aimed at their grandparents, as research shows that grandparents are influenced more by their grandchildren than their own children. The OFT can also target this audience via social media engagement. These initiatives could also be linked the government's Big Society agenda, by encouraging people to take an active role in their communities.

A free celebrity presence will be sought to launch Scamnesty and a possible soap storyline tie in. The OFT will promote the campaign on a national level, securing free PR coverage via TV, radio, newspapers - print and online, consumer magazines, online bloggers, and social media. This will also include using potential partner channels such as Age UK, Citizens Advice, Neighbourhood Watch, Action on Elder Abuse, Carers UK, Community Care, Victim Support, Friends Of The Elderly, Women's Institute (WI), Royal Princess Trust For Carers.

After the campaign, TSS should use the intelligence gathered from the Scamnesty mailings to help inform their work moving forward.

### **Week three: Just Tick It**

Building on the success of the Just Tick It 2010 campaign, we will engage the target audience through the Just Tick It Facebook profile and Twitter account, and by securing free national and local media. For example, consumer music magazines and online blogs. Existing partners such as STAR and the Association Of Ticket Agents, will also be asked to re-engage in the campaign and new potential partners will be sought to maximise reach. A partner toolkit, to include digital campaign badges, will be constructed to encourage campaign engagement.

Various music celebrities also supported the 2010 campaign free of charge to increase PR opportunities. These will be approached again and new ones sought.

The Just Tick It fake ticketing website housed on Consumer Direct's website ([www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/tickets](http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/tickets)) will be used as the main call to action for information on avoiding fake ticket websites.

As target audience insight shows consumers use search engines to locate event tickets when their usual supplier has sold out, Search Engine Optimisation, and perhaps pay per click, will be used to increase the fake ticketing website's presence in search results.

#### **Week four: Bogus holiday clubs**

Bogus holiday clubs are most prevalent in Spain and often target consumers over 35 years.

In 2008, the OFT and TSS ran a joint campaign to increase awareness of holiday clubs. TSS representatives handed out mock scratchcards (similar to those handed out by bogus holiday club representatives) and the OFT's Congratulations! You have not won a free luxury holiday! leaflet (OFT642) at UK airports to holiday makers travelling to Spain and the Canary Islands.

A coordinated day of action will be repeated to raise awareness of bogus holiday clubs and to highlight the new consumer protection legislation. As the new legislation is a European Directive, we will also extend the day of action to involve other ICPEN members, the European Consumer Centre United Kingdom (ECC) and the Spanish European Consumer Centre (CEC) - to increase impact internationally.

The OFT will provide scratchcards and an updated version of the consumer information booklet (OFT642) for all participating TSS. The OFT will also promote the campaign on a national level, securing free PR coverage via TV, radio, newspapers - print and online, consumer magazines, online bloggers, and social media. We will seek to engage travel companies, for example, Thomas Cook, as partner organisations to generate PR and disseminate key messages to holidaymakers. The BIS Consumer Affairs Minister is also likely to be involved.

## Evaluation

The current marketing freeze restrictions prevent the allocation of budget to more formal research evaluation techniques so the impact of the campaign will be measured as follows:

- Number of unique visitors to the relevant areas of Consumer Direct's website.
- Behaviour of visitors to Consumer Direct's website - time spent on website, number of pages visited, origination.
- Number of fans and followers on Facebook and Twitter.
- Number of consumer information booklets ordered via OFT's mailing house.
- Number of calls made to Consumer Direct about scams.
- Number of scams reported via the online reporting function on Consumer Direct's website.
- Activities undertaken by our campaign partners.

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