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# **The Best of Internet ScamBusters**



**The 10 Most  
Important  
Things You  
Can Do Now  
to Avoid  
Getting  
Scammed**

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# #1

## The 10 Most Important Things You Can Do Now to Avoid Getting Scammed

Internet scams are a very serious problem, and the numbers of scams, dollars lost, and people scammed are growing dramatically each year. Although there are no accurate statistics on Internet fraud, experts all agree that numbers are staggering.

*If a scam exists in the real world but it's not yet on the Internet, just wait two hours...*

That's why we started *Internet ScamBusters*. We recognized early on that Internet scams were going to grow tremendously, and as a public service, we wanted to offer a free, educational, and easy-to-read newsletter to help people protect themselves against Internet scams.

### Why is the Internet so attractive to Scammers?

There are at least four aspects of the Internet that make it especially attractive to scam artists:

- 1 The most important is anonymity. It's very easy to hide your identity, making it difficult for others to figure out who you are.
- 2 Low cost is also very important. It costs just a few dollars a month to get an email account and an Internet connection, and with that, someone can cause a lot of grief. For a bit more money, they can create a fraudulent Web site (actually, this can even be done for free). So, the Internet is very inexpensive compared to other methods of committing fraud.

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**3** Since there is such rapid expansion of the Internet, there is always a huge base of new users to exploit. These new users are unaware of common scams and how to protect themselves. And since parts of the Internet have such a sense of community (which fosters trust), people sometimes trust others whom they shouldn't.

**4** Many of the scams on the Internet are either similar or identical to those in the real world. Often, these scams are very sophisticated, having been developed over many years, and are often very difficult to detect. However, the Internet allows virtually instant communication and ridiculously low cost, so these scams can be spread **very** quickly.

In fact, we often say: "If a scam exists in the real world but it's not yet on the Internet, just wait two hours..."

## **The 10 Most Important Things You Can Do**

One of the most common questions we get asked when we do radio, newspaper, and other media interviews is, "What are the best ways to protect yourself against getting scammed online?"

Here is our list of the top ten best ways to protect yourself:

### **10. Use common sense.**

This seems obvious, but people don't always do it. If it seems too good to be true, it probably is. And if you have a gut feeling that something isn't legitimate, you're probably right.

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## **9. If possible, always pay by credit card rather than by check or money order.**

This is perhaps the most counter-intuitive advice on the list.

Here's why: If you use your credit card to make a purchase and you encounter a problem — and the company won't fix it — you can notify (in writing) the bank that issues your credit card that you are disputing the charge, and you don't have to pay the charge while your dispute is being investigated. Your maximum liability is \$50. Plus, many banks will waive that if you're a good customer. So, if the company doesn't deliver the item or they are a scam, you're in a much better position to get your money back.

## **8. Take safety precautions.**

Be especially careful with passwords. For example, select passwords that are not words contained in any dictionary. Instead, use a combination of letters and numbers. Don't give your passwords to anyone. Also, don't write all your passwords down where a snoop, invited or not, can easily find them.

*When creating passwords, avoid using anything obvious — birthdays, your phone number, address, your children's names — anything that's easy to guess. And be sure to use a different password for each account.*

Be careful about private information you give out on the Net (don't publicly state when you'll be on vacation so burglars know the ideal time to rob your home).

Don't let people use your computer unsupervised unless you intend them to have free access to all the data on it. And think about what's on the computer before you make that decision.

Use a firewall. Firewalls make your computer virtually invisible to anyone on the network. A firewall is a good idea for anyone who connects to the Internet.

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It should be considered absolutely essential for anyone with an “always on” connection, such as DSL or cable modems.

One of the best firewalls is Zone Alarm. It’s everything most users will ever need, and they offer a free version. It’s very easy to install and use, and uses very little of your system’s resources. You can get a copy of the free personal version, or the professional version for business use, at [www.zonelabs.com](http://www.zonelabs.com).

Highly recommended for PC users. Mac OS X has a built-in firewall. For more on Mac firewalls, visit [www3.sympatico.ca/dccote/firewall.html](http://www3.sympatico.ca/dccote/firewall.html)

## **7. Be skeptical.**

For example, many companies that promote bulk email will tell you that sending out bulk email is the road to riches. It isn’t. And, if that stock really was such a good deal, why is this person sending you — and millions of other people — this “secret” tip?

When you’re shopping online, always check out the company. Ask for references and check them carefully. A reputable company will be pleased to provide you with lots of references.

Only do business with companies that offer a strong guarantee and/or warranty. Ask the company what will happen if you want to return the product or service. Reputable companies offer strong guarantees and stand behind their products, especially online.

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## **6. Never send an email to anyone that says: “Send this to all your friends.”**

It is almost certainly a hoax. We’ve never seen a legitimate email that includes this language. (There must be, but we’ve never seen one.)

## **5. Be very careful at online auction sites.**

If you want to buy something at an online auction, always check the references of the seller, and only buy from sellers who have good references. Almost all good auction sites have buyer and seller rating systems.

If the item is more expensive than an amount you could comfortably lose, consider using an online escrow service. eBay recommends [www.escrow.com](http://www.escrow.com) for U.S. and Canadian users. There is a fee, but it might be worth it to you.

For more information, see *Online Auctions: Deal or Steal?* at

[www.scambusters.org/Scambusters43.html](http://www.scambusters.org/Scambusters43.html)

## **4. Protect your personal information and your privacy.**

Identity theft is extremely serious, and it’s affecting more and more people. For more information, see *Understanding and Avoiding Identity Theft* at

[www.scambusters.org/Scambusters47.html](http://www.scambusters.org/Scambusters47.html)

## **3. Subscribe to our FREE electronic newsletter, Internet ScamBusters!**

(a shameless plug!) ;-)

Although many scams can be avoided simply by using your common sense, there are other scams that you simply won’t know about unless someone clues you in first. In just a few minutes each month, subscribing to *Internet ScamBusters* can help you protect

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yourself from the many types of Internet scams that you might not be aware of. And it's free.

To subscribe, visit [www.scambusters.org](http://www.scambusters.org).

## **2. Be careful, but don't be paranoid.**

After all, most businesses on the Web are legitimate. Shopping online can provide tremendous advantages — including the safety of not venturing out to shop! — so don't throw the baby out with the bath water. Use good judgment, be careful, follow the advice in this ebook, and you probably won't have any problems.

## **1. NEVER purchase from a bulk unsolicited email (called “spam”) you receive.**

At least 95% of these emails are scams. So, if you avoid ever responding to spam, you've done the single most important thing you can do to avoid getting taken.

As we always say: “If it's spam, it's a scam.”

*Spam, Spam, Spam, Spam...*

*Ever wonder just where that expression comes from? Do you remember the old Monty Python skit where the word “spam” was sung over and over again? Check out Brad Templeton's ideas for more than you probably want to know on how junk email was named spam...*

[www.templetons.com/brad/spamterm.html](http://www.templetons.com/brad/spamterm.html)

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## Meet Jim and Audri Lanford

Jim Lanford is an award-winning engineer who has been designing complex software and integrating state-of-the-art hardware for more than 25 years, including developing the Spartan 1 Space Shuttle Ground Station.

Dr. Audri G. Lanford received her Ph.D. from Stanford University in sociology. She has been described as one of the top experts in the world on what makes Web sites successful.

Audri and Jim are successful entrepreneurs who have together created a number of very different businesses, including one of the fastest growing private companies in the U.S., an Inc. 500 company, and the oldest and largest direct results Internet marketing company.

They have received many top honors and awards, including being honored in Forbes Best of the Web; Yahoo! Internet Life, USA Today Hot Site Award; and many more. They have been featured in hundreds of print and Web publications, including *Forbes*, *BusinessWeek*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Wired* magazine, *Entrepreneur*, *Upside*, *InfoWorld*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and many others.

Jim and Audri are the creators, editors, and publishers of *Internet ScamBusters*, the #1 publication on Internet fraud. *ScamBusters* is a public service that helps individuals and small businesses protect themselves from Internet scams, viruses, and hoaxes. Subscribe free at [www.scambusters.org](http://www.scambusters.org).

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