“Yellow Pages” Scam

What your business should know about business directory scams

What is the “yellow pages” scam?

The “yellow pages” scam is a deceptive practice used to bilk payments from small businesses, nonprofits, and other organizations by deceiving them into ordering and paying for unwanted listings in online business directories. Businesses are deceived into paying for advertising space in what they falsely believe to be the actual Yellow Pages directory, but may in fact be an alternative or altogether nonexistent directory. Often these directories are not distributed to the public at all, and they therefore offer no benefit to the businesses that pay to advertise in them.

What to watch for?

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has identified a number of characteristics that businesses should be aware of when they receive a solicitation for advertising space in a business directory.

- Resembles an invoice.
- Features the name “Yellow Pages” and bears the familiar “walking fingers” logo. Federal copyright and trademark laws protect neither the name nor logo.
- Suggests an affiliation with a recognizable Yellow Pages publisher.
- Leads you to believe that your business is already listed and you are simply being billed for past services.

For additional information please visit the FTC website at www.ftc.gov.

How to protect your business?

Your business should consider taking the following precautions if you receive a piece of mail and are unsure of how to respond:

- Determine whether the mail you have received is a solicitation or a bill/invoice. The United States Postal Service (U.S.P.S) requires a disclaimer if it is a solicitation. Read it carefully!
- Request information from the publisher, including previous copies of their directory, distribution figures and methods, and where the publisher primarily distributes their directory.
- Check with your local Yellow Pages publisher to see if they are affiliated with the solicitor.
- Check with state consumer protection officials for prior complaints against the solicitor.
If you believe that you have been victimized then how should you proceed?

If you believe that your business has been victimized in a “yellow book” scam involving the U.S.P.S then you can submit a Mail Fraud Complaint Form at https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/forms/MailFraudComplaint.aspx or call the U.S.P.S Mail Fraud Complaint Center at 1-800-372-8347.

You might also consider submitting a complaint to the Better Business Bureau, and alerting the Attorney General in your state.

If in doubt, speak to a trusted attorney.

This NFIB alert does not constitute legal advice, and you should consider consulting an attorney about any laws and regulations that are applicable in your state, locality or particular type of business.

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