



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Mystery Shopping Providers Association Applauds Competition Bureau and Toronto Strategic Partnership for Efforts in Scam Investigation

DALLAS, Feb. 22, 2008 – The Mystery Shopping Providers Association (MSPA), the largest professional trade association dedicated to improving service quality using anonymous resources, applauds the recent actions by the Competition Bureau and Toronto Strategic Partnership surrounding a mystery shopping check scam.

In a Feb. 21 news release, the Competition Bureau in Canada announced that it, along with law enforcement partners with the Toronto Strategic Partnership, arrested two alleged operators of a mystery shopping check scam.

In the mystery shopping version of the scam, consumers were asked to cash a cashier's check and wire the money back to a specified address, while conducting a brief evaluation of the wiring service. In some cases, they were also asked to conduct evaluations of other retailers. The "reward" to consumers was keeping a portion of the original check as payment. In reality, the check bounced several days later and the consumer was held liable for the entire amount of the money wired to the international address – typically between \$1,000 and \$5,000.

Since the MSPA first learned of the scam in late 2005, it has made contact with the Federal Trade Commission, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Competition Bureau and Phonebusters, all of which were involved in the cross-border partnership that searched for the scammers.

The MSPA also took steps to warn consumers about this scam, including posting information on its Web site, issuing information to the media and asking its members to alert mystery shoppers. In addition, the MSPA worked with dozens of consumers who were victims or intended victims of the scam and urged them to contact the appropriate authorities.

The MSPA requires its more than 275 member companies around the globe to follow a strict code of ethics that prohibits them from charging mystery shoppers a fee or misleading applicants on actual mystery shopping assignment opportunities.

“As the voice of the legitimate mystery shopping industry, the MSPA has taken very seriously the tasks of working with officials to combat mystery shopping-related scams and warning consumers about them,” said John Swinburn, Executive Director, MSPA. “We are committed to maintaining the integrity of legitimate mystery shopping providers who offer quality mystery shopping services to thousands of businesses. In this particular case, a variant of a scam that has been in existence for many, many years was hatched to take advantage of the allure of mystery shopping. Even though it was not truly a mystery shopping scam, it threatened the image of the industry, so we were extremely anxious to put an end to it.”

Several of the MSPA’s members have also been victimized by the check-cashing scam. Their company names were falsely used, making the scam checks appear to come from a legitimate source.

Mystery shopping is a growing field servicing nearly every consumer industry, including restaurants, retail stores, hotels and resorts, travel and tourism, banks and financial service providers, convenience stores, grocery stores and other consumer locations. Legitimate mystery shopping is the practice of using educated, experienced shoppers to anonymously evaluate the customer experience. Businesses use the information to monitor and improve the customer experience.

For more information about the MSPA and its stance on mystery shopping scams, visit www.mysteryshop.org.

About the MSPA

With more than 275 member companies worldwide, the MSPA (www.mysteryshop.org) has a diverse membership, including marketing research and merchandising companies, private investigation firms, training organizations and companies that specialize in providing mystery shopping services. Its goals are to establish professional standards and ethics for the industry, educate providers, clients and shoppers to improve quality of service, improve the image of the industry and promote the membership to other industry associations and prospect clients.

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