Secret-Mystery Shopper/Personal Assistant Scams

CIS is advising the CUNY community regarding so-called “Secret Shopper” and “Gift Card” scams. Please familiarize yourself with these scams.

Security Threat Identification / Symptoms
Email containing an offer of employment to be a “secret shopper” or “personal assistant.” Such unsolicited offers are scams. Sometimes the message is sent from a CUNY email address whose account has been compromised, or references a CUNY “job placement” office, to lend “legitimacy” to the email.

Recommended User Action
- DO NOT reply to unexpected or unusual email from any sender
- DO NOT reply to email with any personal information or passwords. If you have reason to believe that the request is real, call the institution or company directly
- DO NOT click a link or open an attachment in an unsolicited email message. If you have reason to believe the request is real, type the web address for the company or institution directly into your web browser
- DO NOT use the same password for your work account, bank, Facebook, etc. In the event you do fall victim to a phishing attempt, perpetrators attempt to use your compromised password to access many online services
- DO change ALL your passwords if you suspect any account you have access to may be compromised
- DO be particularly cautious when reading email on a mobile device. It may be easier to miss telltale signs of phishing attempts when reading email on a smaller screen
- DO remember that official communications should not solicit personal information by email
- DO complete the 40-minute information security awareness training located at security.cuny.edu

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Security Threat Explained
In these scams, which are often directed at students, an unsolicited secret shopper or personal assistant employment offer is sent by email, sometimes appearing as if sent by a fellow student.

When a victim responds, the scammer will typically arrange to send the victim a (fake) check and request that it be cashed or deposited immediately. The check amount is represented as both pay for work to be performed and expense money to accomplish requested services. The victim is then typically instructed to purchase gift cards and send back pictures of them with the PIN codes visible. The scammers use the codes to spend the value of the gift cards.

It can take the bank weeks to determine that the check is fake, and when that happens the victim is left responsible for any money advanced and suffers a financial loss from the previously purchased, and now worthless, gift cards.

The fact that legitimate secret shopper jobs exist bolsters the credibility of the scam. The offer email may also refer to a CUNY “job placement” office.

What is a Secret Shopper
Some marketing/merchandising companies legitimately hire “secret” or “mystery” shoppers as a quality assurance measure. Such shoppers anonymously purchase requested items in a store and then report on the experience. Typically, the shopper is reimbursed and sometimes the shopper keeps the purchase and/or receives a small payment. The vast majority of unsolicited secret shopper or personal assistant job offers, however, are scams.

For Further Information
https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0053-mystery-shopper-scams

Secret Shopper Scam Recruitment Examples

Updated: April 2020
Information Security Advisory
Information Security, Computing and Information Services
security.cuny.edu

From: [Redacted]
Sent: Friday, October 26, 2018 7:25 AM
Subject: Part time Job

You have been selected as a Secret Shopper in your area A job that
will not affect your present employment & no sign up fee. It’s fun,
rewarding and flexible. You can make up to $1000 weekly also.
To view details of the job and apply please visit our website
https://tinyurl.com/[Redacted]

Regards

Lucrative potential earnings offer (fake) helps lure victims

From: [Redacted]
Sent: Thursday, October 25, 2018 5:57 AM
Subject: Sign Up! Extra Earning Seeking Female and Male mode

Hello
How are you doing. This Job is currently recruiting. A Modeling Job that will not affect your present employment or studies and
no sign up fee. Its fun, rewarding and flexible.
You can make up to $500 weekly.

To view details of the job and apply go to the link
https://www.cognitoforms.com/[Redacted] and text this
number [Redacted].

Job Placement & Student Services
[Redacted] College
New York NY [Redacted]

Referral to earn extra

[Redacted]

Good Day,

Jigsy shopper is currently seeking to employ individuals in the United States of America for the on going shoppers survey program. A job that will not affect your present employment & no sign up fee. It’s fun, rewarding and flexible. You can make up to $1000 weekly also, try it and make cool cash. Visit our website for more details. www.shadowshopper/jigsy.com

Updated: April 2020
MAKE OVER $300 WEEKLY

JOB BRIEF
There is a need for an urgent replacement for a Personal Assistant. We are looking for a friendly, simple & trust worthy personal assistant. You can take it as a part time job depending on your choice. The hours will be between 2 to 3 hours daily, which can be increased if you want and this will give you free time to go on with your regular job or school activities. I give you 100% guarantee of their legitimacy.

JOB DUTIES
*Manage calendar, appointments, meetings, and reminders
*Process mails.
*Data entry.
*Receive calls at specific times
*Book appointments & Flight reservation

You will be working from home. The hours are flexible so you can spread the time to fit your schedule. You will be provided with sufficient funds and adequate instruction for every task.

If you are interested in this opportunity send your name and contact phone number to Mrs. Laura [email protected] for a kind consideration as the position assures a very attractive pay

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