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CONSUMER BULLETIN

Gas Grocery Rebate Programs too good to be true

By Lynda Pasacreta, BBB President and CEO

Ever see an ad in the local paper that says you can get \$500 worth of free groceries or gas if you make a substantial purchase at a retailer? Your Better Business Bureau would like to remind you that if an offer sounds too good to be true, it usually is.

BBB received thousands of complaints North America-wide about companies who offer online gas and grocery voucher redemption services. Retailers are contacted by third-party marketing companies who offer the companies an opportunity to give their potential customers an incentive shop at their store.

While there are many legitimate programs that are out in the marketplace, the most concerning are the free gas and grocery offers. Consumers who want to take advantage of the offer have to enroll through a website after making their retail store purchase. The websites have names like, claimyourfoodandfuel.com; freegrocerycenter.com; gasandgrocerydepot.com; claimyourgroceries.com and freebeegas.com.

In all cases, consumers have to jump through some serious hoops to get their vouchers for gas or groceries. BBB has received numerous complaints alleging non-receipt and delay in the receipt of the vouchers; even after following the company's instructions for the redemption program. Complaints allege consumers have mailed the required receipts to the company and have had difficulty obtaining the vouchers. In the worst cases, consumers are finding out after a few months waiting that the company has gone out of business.

Three separate companies have gone out of business and have been involved in civil litigation. BBZ Resource Management (Arizona), Tidewater Marketing (Florida) and My Free Travel (Illinois) all have either gone out of business and failed to honour their commitments to their customers. Over the past three years the companies have amassed 4,451 complaints.

Locally, Dodd's Furniture in Victoria reportedly lost \$100,000 through the program (Source: Victoria Times-Columnist) as the store ended up offering either an in-store credit on purchases or a flight and two nights in a hotel in Las Vegas to replace the promotion.

BBB suggests that businesses and consumers looking to do business with a company that offers incentive and/or certificate programs do their research and diligently look into the company and its owners. Make sure that the company is trustworthy by checking it out with BBB.

If you have had an unsatisfactory experience with a company, please file a complaint at mbc.bbb.org.

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