

Modeling agency scams

Models Wanted

Earn \$100 per hour or \$500 per day as a fashion or commercial model. Work full or part time. No experience necessary. Real people types, such as children, grandmothers, college students, and construction workers welcome. No fee.

Could you really be a model or an actor? Maybe your kids have the “right look”? If you have dreams of becoming a model, this ad may be tempting. But before you sign a contract, learn how to sort out the legitimate modeling agencies from the scams.

How the scam works

Modeling agencies place ads in newspapers to encourage potential models, both men and women or kids, to interview with the agency. Many of the ads state “No fee.” Or you may be recruited by a talent scout in the mall.

When you show up for a follow-up appointment, you find yourself in an office with other hopefuls. Once you finally get your turn, you find out that what you thought was a job interview with a modeling or talent agency is really a high-pressure sales pitch for modeling or acting classes, screen tests or photo shoots that

can range in price from several hundred to several thousand dollars.

In the end, most of these would-be models receive no job assistance from the agencies, no job leads, and no modeling employment. In numerous instances, the potential models do not even receive the photographs they pay for. The companies simply pack up and leave town.

How to spot the scam

It may not be easy to recognize a modeling scam because many of the advertising claims and practices may resemble those used by legitimate modeling agencies. Listed below are some common claims that should make you suspicious:

- **“No fee.”** If a modeling agency advertises that there is no fee for its services, you should be wary any time you are asked to pay. Most legitimate agencies make money only by taking a commission from their models’ work. An exception, however, is that you may be charged for your picture to be in an agency book that they send to clients who hire models. Make sure you pay only your portion of the printing costs.

- **“Earn high salaries.”** Typically only experienced, top models can expect to receive large salaries.
- **“Work full or part time.”** Modeling hours can be uneven and sporadic. You may not have the flexibility to choose your own hours.
- **You are told the opportunity could disappear if you do not act now.** You need time to check out a company before you give them any money or personal information. If an offer is good today, it should be good tomorrow.
- **They guarantee a refund.** They say your deposit is refundable. Your deposit may be refundable only if you meet strict refund conditions. Or, you might be told talent experts will evaluate your chances of success and refund anyone not selected. What they do not tell you is the program takes virtually everyone.
- **They only accept payment in cash or money order.** It is a sure sign they are more interested in your money than your career!

- **“Real people types should apply.”** Some ads encourage people of all shapes, sizes, and ages to apply for commercial modeling work that involves the sale of a product. Remember, modeling opportunities are limited even in large cities. Opportunities do exist for “real people” models, but they are rare.
- **Charge you money to take their classes, before you are eligible for modeling work.** A legitimate modeling agency may provide instruction on applying makeup or walking, but most do not charge you for classes. An exception to this is when a modeling agency also serves as a modeling school. A modeling school does charge for classes, but that is a separate function from finding you work as a model.
- **Conduct an unprofessional photo shoot.** Once a modeling agency agrees to represent you, you will need photographs for your portfolio. In the larger modeling markets, such as New York or Los Angeles, the photographs typically are taken in separate photo sessions, each using different clothes, makeup, and hairstyles. Often a model’s portfolio is put together with photographs from more than one photographer. In smaller markets, all photographs may be shot in one session by one photographer, but you should still look different in all your photographs by wearing a variety of cosmetics, clothes, and hairstyles. You may want to shop around for a photographer

that best suits your portfolio needs.

- **Require a particular photographer.** If the modeling agency requires you to work with a particular photographer, chances are the photographer is working with the **modeling** agency, and they are splitting the fee. A legitimate modeling agency may recommend that you work with a certain photographer, but be skeptical if they are insistent.

Could your child be a star

Fake talent scouts love to make you think your baby or child is model material and will gladly help you set up a photo shoot or classes to help you get modeling or acting jobs for your tyke. What they do not tell you is that the market for child models and actors is very small. And because a child’s looks change quickly, legitimate agents, advertising agencies, casting directors, and producers generally ask for casual snapshots, not professional photos.

What about the casting calls you hear about on the radio looking for the next child star? While they may be real in that one or two kids in the country are “discovered,” the agencies holding the calls often use them as a way to get parents to enroll their kids in expensive acting classes.

How to protect yourself

The best protection against losing money to a phony modeling agency is to take precautions. The following list may help you

reduce your chances of losing money.

- Realistically assess your chances for being a model. Were you chosen by the agency because they believe you can make money for them – or just because you can afford to pay money to them?
- Ask for the names, addresses, and phone numbers of models who currently work through the agency and clients who have used its models. Contact the models and clients to verify the information. If you cannot verify the agency’s credentials and the agency is asking for money in advance, you are better off saying no.
- Check the agency’s reputation online. Try searching for the company’s name with words like “scam,” “rip-off,” or “complaint.”
- Contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection to find out if other complaints have been filed against the agency. You can also check their reputation with the Better Business Bureau.
- Check out all claims made in agency advertisements, sales presentations, and literature.
- Be suspicious of agencies that require models to pay fees, including fees for agency books, by cash or money order only. This is a strong signal that the agency is interested in taking your money, not in representing you as a model.
- Get everything in writing! Keep copies of all important papers,

such as your contract and agency literature. Be sure to get all verbal promises in writing. You may need these if you have a dispute with the agency.

Where to go for help

If you have paid money to a modeling agency, and believe they are involved in a scam, first contact the company and request a refund. If you are not satisfied, file a complaint with the Bureau of Consumer Protection. Also, contact the advertising manager of the newspaper that ran the ad you answered. For ethical and practical reasons, the advertising manager may be interested to learn about any problems you have had with the agency.

For more information or to file a complaint, visit our website or contact us at:

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2811 Agriculture Drive
PO Box 8911
Madison WI 53708-8911**

**E-MAIL:
DATCPHotline@wisconsin.gov**

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(From the FTC brochure "Facts for Consumers:
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