

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

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 gifts 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

Hello,
This Job is currently recruiting. A Job that will not affect your present employment or studies, fun and rewarding. You get to make up to \$300 weekly, I tried it and i made cool cash. If You are interested you can visit their website at www.timecodeoutsourcing.com to apply and read more about the job.
Best Regards
Job Placement & Student Services
City University of New York
University Offices
205 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017

No such office exists

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/\[REDACTED\]](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 model

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/\[REDACTED\]](https://www.cognitoforms.com/[REDACTED])) and text this number [REDACTED].

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

Referral to earn extra

[REDACTED]
Tue 6/26/2018 10:50 AM

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

