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SOMETHING'S PHISHY

4 COMMON FINANCIAL SCAMS TO AVOID



From dating swindles to Bitcoin and cryptocurrency hoaxes, it's hard to tell the difference between honest offers and scams. Even worse, scams are becoming more creative every day. Here's a list of some of the most common financial scams to be aware of.

Cryptocurrency Scams

Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies have taken the world by storm. Because many people don't understand how cryptocurrency works, it's easy for cybercriminals to pull a fast one — or attempt to, anyway. To trick unsuspecting victims, scammers set up fake websites that mimic legitimate cryptocurrency platforms. These sites then either urge you to make investments or they will steal your information outright.

Fraudulent Retailers

On social media websites, you may have noticed suspicious online stores featuring deals that are too good to be true. At checkout, instead of being directed to a trusted third-party payment process, these merchants may ask for wire transfers or gift cards. Some of these online stores might not even provide contact information!

Fake Debt Collectors

Criminals will claim to be government representatives and urge you to settle a debt putting you at risk of being arrested, losing your home, or forfeiting your Social Security benefits. These scammers will ask you to pay the fake balance upfront to avoid any serious repercussions. Remember, government entities do not cold call, so you know to hang up or hit "delete."

Work-From-Home Scams

As working from home has recently become the norm for many, this hoax has become even easier for criminals to pull off. Cybercriminals will contact you, stating you can make hundreds of dollars a week doing nothing more than shopping online as a mystery shopper or another enticing task. They will then tell you that to get started, you'll need to pay upfront for training materials — but once you do, you'll never hear from them again.

As a general rule of thumb, stay clear of any offers that seem too good to be true. Likewise, avoid transactions that don't use a trusted third-party merchant, and always do your research! If something seems off, trust your instincts! In today's world, you never know what hoaxes exist!



"The ocean, by far, is the best way to cool off on these hot summer days."

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Welcome to the Dog Days of Summer

HOW DO YOU STAY COOL?



"Welcome to the dog days of summer," they said. "It won't be THAT hot outside," they said!

Notoriously, this time of year is known as the dog days of summer. The days feel punishingly hot and long, and it seems we all wear sweat as an accessory all day long. Even the actual dogs are miserably hot in this dead-of-summer heat. But did you know the dog days of summer don't have anything to do with dogs at all?

The term refers to the brightest star in the Canis Major (*big dog* in Latin) constellation, Sirius. According to the Romans and Greeks, the hottest days of summer take place around the same time Sirius rises alongside the sun in the Northern Hemisphere. They believed a great amount of heat was generated from these two stars being so close together, and that's why we experience such hot weather in these late summer months!

While we now know this is not true, and this time of year is just the peak of summer heat, we have also found ways to still enjoy the sun while trying to stay cool, too. The beach, pool, and lake are some of my favorite ways to cool off. I'm lucky enough to have my own pool, readily available for me to take a dip in whenever I'd like, and it's always fun to venture to the lake for some swimming, too.

However, I've made some of my greatest memories at the beach, although some of them were a little challenging, too — let me explain!

We have a house in Panama City, right on the Gulf of Mexico, and it's a great destination to get away for the weekend, especially during these hot months. However, going to the beach takes a lot of preparation, especially if you have kids.

I remember when I was younger with little children, the checklist was endless before our toes even sank into the sand and we got a glimpse of the water. We had to pack all of the toys, towels, blankets, snacks, sunscreen, umbrellas, tents, diapers, and goggles. Once we got to the beach and got everyone lathered up in sunscreen, including myself because I burn very easily, it was already time to change a diaper or make sure someone's hat was still on their head.

Of course, the goal was to stay for 3–4 hours to give the kids plenty of time to play and take some time to enjoy all the beach has to offer, but if you're a parent, you know this beach trip can easily become more of a chore than a relaxing time — especially if you have a little one who loves to eat sand. You wind up permanently on no-sand-eating duty!

Even with all of that, we always had a fantastic time and the ocean, by far, is the best way to cool off on these hot summer days. We created some fabulous memories on this beach, and now that the kids are older, I'm able to spend more time in the ocean and hanging out with the wife. Ironically, even though I now appreciate the relaxation, I do miss those days with the younger kids. It's a constant reminder to live in the moment and never take anything for granted — life is too short, even though these dog days of summer seem long!

-Ben Golden

SOAK IN THE SUN WITH NO WORRIES

Protect Your Belongings

The best part of summer vacation is definitely spending time at the beach. It's a great place to relax while soaking in the sun and dipping your toes in the water. One thing that can be a hassle, though, is protecting your valuables. With so much traffic on the sand, it's an easy place for someone to scoop up a bag or snag a phone that's sitting on a towel. Here are a few helpful tips to keep your valuables safe while you enjoy the beach.

The Pros of the Lifeguard Tower

Something as simple as sitting near a lifeguard tower can deter potential thieves. Since lifeguards have a clear view of the area, they'll be able to spot suspicious-looking people who are creeping too close to your belongings. If there isn't a tower nearby, consider sitting near a pier. Your items are less likely to be stolen where there are more witnesses.

Waterproof Accessories

Who says you can't be stylish on the beach? Wearing a waterproof waist pouch or carrying a waterproof dry bag can create a greater sense of security. Knowing your valuables are right there floating with you can ease your mind. You could even bury your waterproof bag in the sand for extra protection.

Disguising Valuables

One great way to hide smaller valuables, like keys or cash, is to disguise them in food packages. Items such as Cheez-It boxes or cans of Pringles are a sneaky way to divert attention away from your belongings. If someone just so happens to creep by your spot, it's unlikely they'll grab a snack as they look for valuables to steal.

Someone to Watch Your Belongings

If you don't have acquaintances nearby, find someone who appears trustworthy to watch over your things — families with children may be a safe option. This isn't an ideal tactic, since it requires you to have a bit of trust in human kindness from a complete stranger. Or you could possibly leave belongings at a restaurant or bar you frequent.

Spending vacation at the beach doesn't need to be stressful. The risk will always be there, but these options can reduce the chances of someone stealing your valuables and can ease your mind while you relax.



KEEP IT ON FILE!

The Importance of Having Documentation to Substantiate Your Return

While tax season will certainly come and go each year, the same is not true for the records that accompany each return you file. According to the IRS, when tax season rolls around in April and it's time to file your taxes for the previous year, you must have solid records to support your expenses, income, and credits reported on your return. More likely than not, these records will come from the same records you keep either for your small business or in your personal financial records.

Each item you list on your yearly tax return comes together to form a burden of proof that must be backed up by proper documentation and records to prove each item is valid and legitimate. In most cases, it is suggested to keep all proof of income, deductions, and credits safely in a file for at least three years, or longer if recommended by your accountant, insurance company, or attorney.

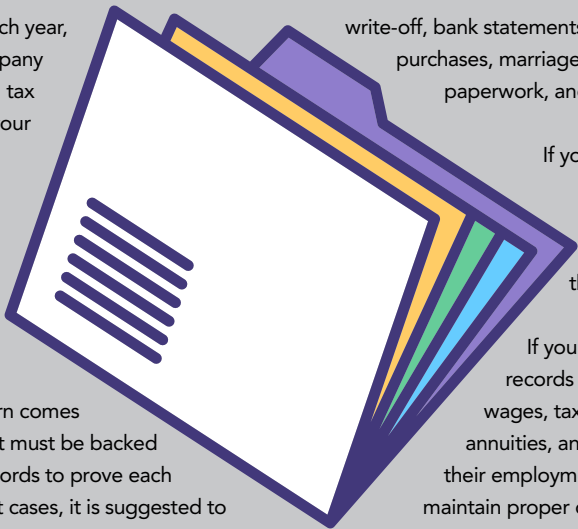
Some examples of documents that should be filed away with your personal taxes are receipts and invoices for goods and services you paid for and used as a

write-off, bank statements, documentation of large vehicle or home purchases, marriage certificates, divorce paperwork, child adoption paperwork, and large medical bills.

If you own your business, keep all invoices for goods and services that you pay, and records for all of your profits. These items account for and support your profits and losses for the year. Keep all bank statements as well.

If you have employees, be sure to maintain records of their information including names, wages, tax deposits, Social Security numbers, annuities, and other information pertinent to their employment. And, if you travel for business, maintain proper documentation of all travel and entertainment expenses.

If you're ever unsure of what you should or shouldn't hang onto for three years, the IRS has resources on their website showing which records to keep and for how long. Remember: It's always better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it!



Tasty Bruschetta Chicken

Inspired by Delish.com



Fresh tomatoes and basil abound in August, practically begging to become bruschetta! This recipe turns that appetizer into a main dish.

INGREDIENTS

- 4 boneless and skinless chicken breasts, pounded to even thickness
- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp lemon juice, divided
- 1/4 tsp pepper
- 1 tsp Italian seasoning
- 3 tomatoes, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp fresh basil, chopped
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 4 slices mozzarella cheese
- Parmesan cheese, grated

DIRECTIONS

1. Add chicken to a large resealable bag.
2. In a small bowl, combine olive oil, 1 tbsp lemon juice, pepper, and Italian seasoning. Pour over chicken and seal. Refrigerate for 30 minutes.
3. Turn a grill to medium-high heat and add the chicken. Discard the marinade. Grill chicken 5–7 minutes per side or until fully cooked.
4. Combine the remaining lemon juice, tomatoes, garlic, and basil. Add salt and pepper, to taste.
5. Before taking the chicken off the grill, top each breast with a slice of mozzarella cheese. Cover and cook 2–3 minutes, then serve topped with the tomato mixture and grated Parmesan cheese.

August Win of the Month

PERSONAL ISSUES LEAD TO HEAVY TAX BURDEN

CASE SNAPSHOT

Type of IRS Issue: 1040

Tax Year in Question: 2017–2020

IRS Claimed Liability: \$65,561.91

Savings: \$65,561.91

Tax complications are stressful! Our client, a woman in her 50s, came to us feeling overwhelmed. Along with many issues clouding her personal life, she had what she felt was an insurmountable IRS debt. Having always been a taxpayer in good standing with the IRS, she suddenly found herself with an accumulated debt of \$65,561.91. Even though she spent four years filing her returns, she had failed to pay her balance due. But her story starts long before that.

Dealing with a divorce that had been dragging on for over eight years, it began to take an emotional toll. Because of the stress of the long-protracted litigation and basis behind the divorce, she began having some anxiety issues and became depressed. The severity of her anxiety and depression was too much to handle, so she was unable to work. She was able to live off of her should-be-ex-husband's alimony and dutifully claimed that money as income but didn't pay taxes due on that amount. The IRS finally came after her — claiming she owed over \$65,000 in taxes, penalties, and interest.

Shortly before contacting us, her should-be-ex-husband went on disability, which significantly reduced her alimony payments, therefore reducing her ability to pay. Using our trademarked "CNC Football" process, we were able to secure our client a "CNC — Currently Not Collectible" status. Our client is now able to relax, focus on re-establishing herself post-divorce, and concentrate on getting healthy.