

FTC Business Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Division of Consumer & Business Education

When Yellow Pages Invoices Are Bogus

That invoice bearing the familiar “walking fingers” logo and the name “Yellow Pages” could be a camouflaged invitation to lose money.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation’s consumer protection agency, and the Yellow Pages Association (YPA) caution businesses that unscrupulous promoters are soliciting advertising for online, alternative, or nonexistent business directories. Although these directories appear to be legitimate Yellow Pages publications, they are not distributed to the public, posted on the Web, or promoted as promised. As a result, the directories — if they exist at all — offer no benefits to businesses that pay to advertise in them.

The solicitation to buy directory ad space or membership may look like an invoice and bear the “walking fingers” logo and the Yellow Pages name. Neither the name nor the logo is protected by federal copyright or trademark registration. That’s how fraudulent promoters are able to lead businesses to believe they are affiliated with local telephone directories distributed in a particular area.

Of course, not all solicitations you receive in the mail look like bills, invoices, or account statements. Your business may receive a check that looks like a refund or rebate check. Read the front and back carefully. By cashing the check, you may be agreeing to be billed monthly for something you don’t want or need, such as Internet access or membership in an online directory. Be skeptical when you receive offers from strangers. Some solicitations could violate the law if they misrepresent information.

The U.S. Postal Service requires solicitations that look like invoices, bills, or account statements to carry one of the following notices:

THIS IS NOT A BILL. THIS IS A SOLICITATION. YOU ARE UNDER NO OBLIGATION TO PAY THE AMOUNT STATED ABOVE UNLESS YOU ACCEPT THIS OFFER, or

THIS IS A SOLICITATION FOR AN ORDER OF GOODS OR SERVICES, OR BOTH, AND NOT A BILL, INVOICE OR STATEMENT OF ACCOUNT DUE. YOU ARE UNDER NO OBLIGATION TO MAKE ANY PAYMENTS ON ACCOUNT OF THIS OFFER UNLESS YOU ACCEPT THIS OFFER.

Before you buy directory advertising space, membership through a mail solicitation, or pay an “invoice,” take the following steps:

- **Check out the company and its publication.** Call your local Yellow Pages publisher to see if it is affiliated with the soliciting company.
- **Ask for a copy of a previous directory edition.**
- **Ask for the online directory’s Web address and call advertisers in the directory to ask if their listing has been a good buy.** If your business is listed in the Yellow Pages of a legitimate publisher, you likely will be listed in their online directory at no charge.
- **Ask the publisher for written information about where the directory is distributed,** how it is distributed, how often it is published, and distribution or circulation figures.
- **Check with your local and state consumer protection agencies** to determine if any complaints have been filed about the publisher. This isn’t a guarantee, but it is a prudent step.

Tip-Offs to Rip-Offs

Be suspicious if the invoice includes a threat that your listing will be deleted.

The Walking Fingers logo is not trademarked in the United States so it is not a guarantee of a legitimate Yellow Pages company.



BEST-EVER YELLOW PAGES

6128296
BEST-EVER YELLOW PAGES
SUITE 2
2689 MADISON STREET
CONRAD, TX 79222

Bogus bills usually do not include a phone number for inquiries.

BUSINESS LISTING PROFILE SOLICITATION

BUSINESS NAME/ADDRESS	CLASSIFICATION	TELEPHONE
Your company to be listed as follows with your approval. HANLON & MAJEWSKI, INC 100 ACE BLVD MONESSEN, PA 16333		
REF. NO. 2847369	COMMUNICATIONS	555/555-5555

Bogus bills often include a fictitious reference or account number.

Our records indicate your company is classified as shown below:
Please verify classification(s) required with ✓

Classification	Classification No.	Annual Rate per classification
<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	990000	\$255.00
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		
PAY THIS AMOUNT		\$255.00

The "Amount Due" is typically less than \$300 so as to not raise accounting suspicion.

Solicitations must include the "THIS IS NOT A BILL" disclaimer.

YOUR FREE WHITE-PAGE LISTING WILL BE INCLUDED WITH EACH YELLOW-PAGE LISTING OF \$255.00 BILLED ANNUALLY. TERMS ON THE REVERSE SIDE OF THIS COPY. THIS IS A STATEWIDE CLASSIFIED YELLOW PAGE DIRECTORY ADVERTISEMENT SOLICITATION.

THIS IS NOT A BILL

NOTICE

RETURN BOTTOM PORTION BY 9/25/07
TO RECEIVE YOUR DIRECTORY LISTING

CHECK ONE:

- Listing is correct as shown above. Please print as is in the Forthcoming Edition.
- Changes indicated **below** are necessary before printing in Forthcoming Edition.

ACCOUNT NAME: HANLON & MAJEWSKI, INC

X

ADVERTISER'S SIGNATURE

ADDRESS: 100 ACE BLVD.
MONESSEN, PA 16333

PRINT NAME: _____

CLASSIFICATION: COMMUNICATIONS

TITLE: _____ DATE: _____

PHONE NO: 555/555-5555

REFERENCE NO: _____

FAX NO: _____ (\$9.50 EXTRA)

DIRECTORY REPRESENTATIVE: R. SMITH

PLEASE MAKE ANY NECESSARY CORRECTIONS BEFORE RETURNING THIS FORM
BEST-EVER YELLOW PAGES SUITE 2, 2689 MADISON STREET, CONRAD, TX 79222
BEST-EVER is not affiliated with any local telephone company.

Please return form in the enclosed envelope.

For More Information and to File a Complaint

If you think you've been victimized in a fraud scheme that involves the U.S. Mail, submit a **Mail Fraud Complaint Form to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service** at www.usps.com/postalinspectors/fraud/MailFraudComplaint.htm or call the U.S. Postal Service's Mail Fraud Complaint Center at 1-800-372-8347.

Alert your State Attorney General. You can find contact information at www.naag.org, or check the blue pages of the phone book under State Government.

Submit a complaint to the Better Business Bureau at www.bbb.org.

In addition, you may direct questions about Yellow Pages publishers to: Yellow Pages Association, Connell Corporate Park, 200 Connell Drive, Suite 1700, Berkeley Heights, NJ 07922; www.ypassociation.org; 1-800-841-0639.

You also may contact the Consumer Response Center at the Federal Trade Commission. The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive, and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop, and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft, and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

Produced in cooperation with the Yellow Pages Association

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION	ftc.gov
1-877-FTC-HELP	FOR THE CONSUMER

May 2007