

¡OJO!

FTC Resources for Hispanic Communities

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ftc.gov/espanol

FROM THE EDITOR

This is the premier issue of ¡Ojo!, the Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) newsletter for Hispanic consumers. ¡Ojo! has consumer tips, news about FTC actions against scammers targeting Hispanics, information on the FTC's outreach to Hispanic communities, and many more resources for you and people you know.

— Alvaro Puig
Bureau of Consumer Protection, FTC

¡OJO! THE FTC'S NATIONAL HISPANIC INITIATIVE

A recent consumer fraud survey commissioned by the FTC, the nation's consumer protection agency, found that Hispanics, whether they are Spanish speakers or not, are about twice as likely as non-Hispanic whites to be victims of consumer fraud.


When you consider the much-publicized growth rate of the Hispanic population in the U.S., it comes as no surprise that fraudsters are setting their sights on this community and the lucrative market it represents. Hispanic consumers have an estimated \$700 billion in buying power, and the market has experienced unprecedented growth in the amount of advertising. The FTC launched its Hispanic Law Enforcement and Outreach Initiative in 2003 to address fraud against Hispanics. The goal of the Initiative is to:

- reduce fraud against Hispanic consumers
- raise awareness of fraud in Hispanic communities
- raise awareness of the FTC so consumers know how and where to report fraud
- increase reporting of fraud to the FTC by phone (1-877-FTC-HELP) or online at ftc.gov.

To learn more, visit the campaign web site at ftc.gov/ojo.

Since 2004, the FTC has announced 21 law enforcement actions and settlements against companies targeting Hispanic consumers. Read about the cases at ftc.gov/espanol.

EDUCATING COMMUNITIES

The Hispanic Outreach Initiative aims to encourage consumers to recognize, avoid, and report fraud by providing practical information in Spanish on frauds in the marketplace. It began with a campaign, *¡Ojo! Mantente alerta contra el fraude. Infórmate con la FTC*, that includes a series of radio public service announcements, partnership-building efforts with community-based organizations, and outreach about fraud. The pilot phase of the campaign was launched in 11 metropolitan areas with large or emerging Hispanic populations: Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Phoenix, San Antonio, Raleigh, and Washington, DC. 

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Comisión Federal de Comercio
ftc.gov/espanol
1-877-FTC-HELP

REACHING OUT TO COMMUNITY GROUPS

An important component of the FTC's mission is to educate consumers about their rights so they can make more informed decisions in the marketplace, recognize fraud, and avoid it. To reach Hispanic consumers, the FTC is enlisting the help of community groups throughout the nation.

OUTREACH AND LAW ENFORCEMENT WORKSHOPS

Since October 2004, the FTC and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) have held outreach workshops in Chicago, Dallas, and Miami to discuss ways to combat fraud against Hispanics. The workshops aim to identify the most common local frauds and discuss ways to address them; facilitate dialogue with local government, consumer groups, and members of the Hispanic community on issues affecting Hispanic consumers; and share consumer education resources to help local communities conduct outreach about fraud and how to report it.

"These workshops play an important role in bringing local law enforcement and community leaders together — often for the first time — to discuss the issues most relevant to the Hispanic community and build lasting partnerships to help fight fraud," said Andrea Foster, Director of the FTC's Southeast Region.


During the Miami workshop, held in May, the FTC and its local and state law enforcement partners announced

55 law enforcement actions that are part of an ongoing effort to stop fraud exploiting the Hispanic community. The actions involve a range of products and services, including prize-promotion scams, bogus weight-loss products, immigration fraud, fake high school diplomas, and mortgage fraud.


On June 23, the FTC, the Montgomery County, Maryland, Division of Consumer Affairs, and AARP-Maryland are co-hosting a Hispanic Symposium in Rockville, Md.; the FTC and USPIS are co-hosting another Hispanic fraud workshop in Phoenix on July 26.

OUTREACH FROM COAST TO COAST

Among the recent events that FTC staff has attended to share fraud prevention messages are:


- The first-ever Hispanic Scam Jam in Charlotte, sponsored by the Better Business Bureau of North Carolina;
- The Annual Diabetes Fair, in Washington, DC, sponsored by La Clínica del Pueblo, Univision, and the Office of the Mayor of the District of Columbia;
- A financial literacy fair in Yakima, Wash., that included a series of workshops on financial issues geared toward the immigrant Hispanic community; and
- A community and legal fair in Silver Spring, Md., co-hosted by CASA de Maryland, a Hispanic immigrant rights organization, and the Maryland Hispanic Bar Association. 

HOW YOUR COMPLAINT HELPS THE FTC FIND SCAMMERS

By filing a complaint with the FTC at ftc.gov/complaint or at ftc.gov/queja, you can help stop fraudsters from cheating consumers. Although the FTC usually cannot follow up on individual complaints, the information you provide can help show a pattern of violations that may require action. You can submit a complaint by phone in Spanish and anonymously, if you prefer, by calling 1-877-FTC-HELP. 


FREE CREDIT REPORTS AVAILABLE

Thanks to a recent amendment to the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA), consumers now have a right to a free credit report every 12 months from each of the three nationwide consumer reporting companies. “This new legal right gives consumers an important tool for protecting their identity and keeping track of their credit,” said Lydia Parnes, Director of the FTC’s Bureau of Consumer Protection.

The FTC recommends that consumers review their credit report periodically to verify its accuracy. Credit reports contain information about where you live, how you pay your bills, and whether you’ve been sued, arrested, or filed for bankruptcy. To order your free credit report, call toll-free 1-877-322-8228 or visit annualcreditreport.com. It is the only authorized online source for your free annual credit report. Your request for a free annual credit report must be made in English. 

SU ACCESO A INFORMES DE CRÉDITO GRATUITOS


Una nueva enmienda a la ley federal llamada la Ley de Informe Justo de Crédito (*Fair Credit Reporting Act*, FCRA) requiere que, a su pedido, cada una de las compañías de informe del consumidor a nivel nacional le provea cada 12 meses una copia gratuita de su informe de crédito. Un informe de crédito contiene información sobre su lugar de residencia, la manera en que usted paga sus facturas y si usted ha sido demandado, arrestado o se ha declarado en bancarrota.

Para solicitar su informe de crédito, haga clic en annualcreditreport.com, llame al 1-877-322-8228 o complete el formulario llamado Annual Credit Report Request Form y envíelo por correo a: Annual Credit Report Request Service, P.O. Box 105281, Atlanta, GA 30348-5281. La solicitud de su informe de crédito anual gratis debe ser hecha en inglés. 

FREE INFORMATION HELPS CONSUMERS RECOGNIZE RIP-OFFS

The FTC has many new consumer publications in Spanish to help people spot and avoid fraud. These publications are available at ftc.gov/espanol and cover topics such as:


- how to improve gas mileage
- buying and selling timeshares
- advance-fee loans and pay day loans
- basics of establishing credit for young adults
- debt management plans
- work-at-home and business opportunity fraud
- planning for a funeral
- hiring a home improvement contractor
- fighting back against ID theft

To order free copies of these and other FTC publications in Spanish or English, download the order form at ftc.gov/consumer. 

INFORMACIÓN GRATIS AYUDA A LOS CONSUMIDORES A RECONOCER LAS ESTAFAS

La FTC ofrece a la comunidad Hispana información sobre varios tipos de fraudes y consejos para reconocerlos. Los temas incluyen:

- cómo optimizar el rendimiento de gasolina
- cómo comprar y vender tiempos compartidos y planes vacacionales
- cómo establecer el crédito
- planes de administración de deuda
- ofertas de trabajo en casa
- planificación de un funeral
- cómo contratar un contratista general
- cómo defenderse contra el robo de identidad

Para ver estas y otras publicaciones, visite ftc.gov/publicaciones. 

DON'T PAY FOR THE PROMISE OF GUARANTEED CREDIT

According to the FTC's recent consumer fraud survey, four and a half million consumers — 2.1 percent of the U.S. adult population — paid fees in advance for the promise of a loan or credit card, and never received either. According to the survey, advance-fee loan scams were the most frequently reported type of consumer fraud.

To help consumers avoid advance-fee loan scams, the FTC says:

1. Don't pay for the promise of a loan. In the U.S., it is illegal for companies doing business by phone to promise you a loan and ask you to pay a fee for it before it comes through.
2. Ignore any ad or offer that guarantees a loan in exchange for a fee in advance, regardless of your credit.
3. Don't give your credit card, bank account, or Social Security number on the telephone, by fax, or via the Internet unless you are familiar with the company and know why the information is necessary.

If someone promised you a loan for a fee and didn't deliver, file a complaint with the FTC at ftc.gov/complaint or 1-877-FTC-HELP. To learn more about advance-fee loan scams, visit ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/tmarkg/loans.htm.

LA VERDAD SOBRE LOS PRÉSTAMOS CON CARGO ADELANTADO

Ha aparecido un nuevo tipo de predator, son los estafadores que están ofreciendo préstamos con cargo adelantado a consumidores desprevenidos, les sacan dinero a cambio de la promesa de un préstamo o crédito y entonces desaparecen dejando a los consumidores en problemas. Con frecuencia, estos “profesionales de la estafa” utilizan la carnada de presentarse como prestadores legítimos para lograr que los consumidores caigan en la trampa de sus falsos ofrecimientos.

La FTC le da consejos para evitar estas trampas:

1. No pague por la promesa de un préstamo. Es considerado ilegal que las compañías que operan telefónicamente dentro de los EE.UU. le prometan un préstamo y le soliciten que pague por el mismo antes de otorgárselo.
2. Ignore los anuncios — o los discursos telefónicos — que garanticen el otorgamiento de un préstamo a cambio del pago por adelantado de un cargo.
3. No dé su número de tarjeta de crédito, cuenta bancaria o número de Seguro Social por teléfono, fax o en Internet a menos que tenga una relación preestablecida con la compañía y sepa la razón por la cual es necesario que provea sus datos.

Si alguien le prometió un préstamo por un cargo adelantado y no se lo otorgó, denuncie el hecho ante la FTC en ftc.gov/queja o llamando al 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357). Para más información sobre esta estafa y otros asuntos de crédito, visite ftc.gov/credito.

Important FTC Resources

To file a complaint, or to get free information on consumer issues, visit ftc.gov or call 1-877-FTC-HELP.

To learn more about *¡Ojo!*, the FTC's Hispanic Outreach Initiative, visit ftc.gov/ojo or call 202-326-3689.