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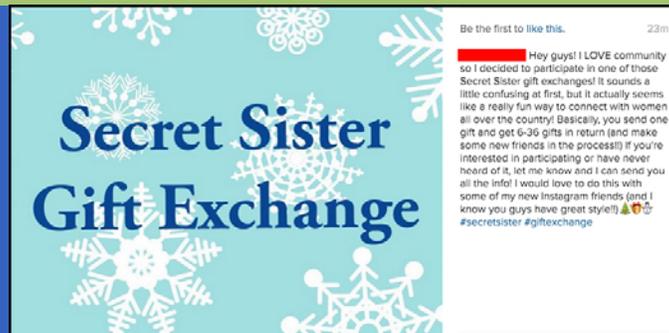
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December Holiday Hoaxes Yule Not Want to Miss



Gift Exchange May Be More than You Bargained For

You may have noticed some of your Facebook and Instagram friends posting content about a “secret sister gift exchange.” Even though the “secret sister gift exchange” sounds promising, it is considered a hoax that has gone viral. The “secret sister gift exchange” message says that if you buy a gift of \$10 or more and add your name to a list, then you will receive 36 gifts. NOT TRUE.

It is actually against Facebook’s agreement terms to “engage in unlawful multi-level marketing, such as a pyramid scheme,” on the social network. Posting personal details on Facebook also makes you vulnerable to identity fraud.

This hoax started to appear at the end of October, but it has been spreading rapidly over the past week. This "secret sister gift exchange" is a modern version of an age-old chain letter scheme and if you ask the Postal service, it's illegal and are essentially forms of gambling. Stick with gift exchanges live and in person.

Read A Review and Check it (at least) Twice

Astroturfing ~Never heard of it? Well, chances are, you've encountered it. Increasingly, retailers and manufacturers ask their customers to write positive reviews of their products or services on various websites—sometimes offering a discount for doing so. Advertising and public-relations agencies have also gotten in on the act, masquerading online as delighted consumers. While these reviews appear to be genuine they aren't. Here are some tips to help you discern the difference between a fake endorsement and the real deal.

Examine the review's language. A real review is usually more moderate in its praise using less formal language as well. Also, watch for a description of the user's experience. Authentic reviews provide specific information about how the item performed. Be wary of reviews with formal product names, model numbers, or tech or marketing jargon.

Investigate the reviewer. Some sites, like [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), cross-reference user reviews with their buyer database and label those people as "verified purchasers" of the merchandise that they're reviewing. These are the most reliable reviewers.

Check the timing and the number of reviews. It can be a red flag if there are multiple accolades for a product or a service.

Check more than one website for reviews. Compare these and make sure the same reviewer isn't working for multiple companies.

12 Days of Holiday Scams

Too many to publish here, check out these additional lists of holiday tricks that will ruin anyone's stocking. Just click on these links and print out the helpful lists.

[12 Holiday Scams to Watch For](#) [Online Shopping Tips](#)



THINK YOU'VE BEEN SCAMMED?
If you suspect you've been scammed or exploited, call our Fraud Hot Line to report it.
720-913-9179

If you would like a Word document version of this newsletter, I'm happy to send along, just email with a request.



Interested in learning more about scams happening in Denver? Do you want to know how to protect yourself from identity theft? Maro Casparian is available for speaking engagements with faith-based organizations, neighborhood associations, PTAs, schools, rotary clubs, etc. Call or email me to schedule a presentation.

And, as always, feel free to forward this email to others to spread the word.

Maro Casparian
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Email amc@denverda.org me to:
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