

## Consumers report many issues with magazine telemarketing firm

Written by

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The Better Business Bureau of Minnesota and North Dakota (BBB) has given Midwest Home Office, Inc., a telemarketing firm which sells magazine subscriptions, an “F” rating, which is the lowest rating a company can get. Complaints to the BBB involve allegations of sales practice issues, non-delivery of magazines and free gifts, and customer service issues.

Customers who have filed complaints through the BBB state company representatives contacted them saying they had won a \$1,000 online shopping spree. However, customers allege that the prize would only be awarded if they also agreed to purchase magazine subscriptions. Some customers say that after agreeing to buy magazine subscriptions they were then billed for a higher amount than had been discussed. Others stated they either didn't receive their magazines in a timely manner or didn't receive the promised shopping spree.

“At a time when subscription costs are going down for most magazines, customers really need to take time to carefully assess these telemarketing pitches,” said Dana Badgerow. “Paying \$30 a month on an impulse purchase might not seem like much at first, but it adds up very quickly over the course of the sales agreement – which in some cases is three years.”

Other complaints against Midwest Home Office, Inc. involve poor customer service. Some customers allege that after agreeing to buy subscriptions, the company was not helpful when they tried to cancel after the fact or refused to cancel the agreements as promised, leading to unwanted credit card charges.

Midwest Home Office, Inc. is headquartered in Crystal, Minnesota. The company has responded to all complaints filed through the BBB, in most cases by settling consumers' accounts for payments made and allowing customers to continue receiving the magazines they ordered. However, based on the pattern of complaints, the company has failed to correct the underlying cause of the complaints.

If you're contacted by a telemarketer selling magazine subscriptions, the BBB recommends the following steps to avoid potential problems:

- Have the company send you their offer in writing before committing to a purchase or providing a credit card. In many cases, customers don't understand all of the terms of the contracts they're entering into.
- Do the math. Monthly payments add up quickly. Take time to sketch out the terms of the agreement; see what it will cost you over the long run.
- Decide if you really need or want the magazines. If no one had contacted you, would you order them otherwise?
- Comparison shop. With the publishing industry facing increased competition from the Internet, many publishers are steeply discounting their subscription rates. If there's a magazine you're interested in, find out how much it would cost to purchase a subscription directly from the publisher.
- Don't let yourself be pressured. It's a lot easier to say 'no' or you need more time upfront than it is to get out of an agreement once you enter into it.

*The mission of the Better Business Bureau is to promote, through self-regulation, the highest*

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*standards of business ethics and conduct, and to instill public confidence in responsible businesses through programs of education and action that inform, protect and assist the general public. Contact the BBB at <http://www.thefirstbbb.org> or 651-699-1111, toll-free at 1-800-646-6222.*