

Protecting Wisconsin Consumers for 75 Years

Modeling agency scams

Models Wanted

Earn \$100 per hour or \$500 per day as a fashion or commercial model.

Full or part time. No experience necessary. Real people types, such as children, grandmothers, college students, and construction workers welcome. No fee.

If you have dreams of becoming a model, this ad may be tempting. But before you sign a contract, learn how to sort out the legitimate modeling agencies from the scams.

This brochure will give you tips on how to detect and avoid fraudulent modeling schemes and tell you where you can go for help if you become a victim of a scam.

How the scam works

Modeling agencies place ads in newspapers to encourage potential models, both men and women, to interview with the agency. Many of the ads stated "No fee." However, the models "selected" by these agencies are asked to sign a contract agreeing to pay several hundred dollars for classes or photographs that the agency requires before they can work as models. In the end, most of these would-be models received no job assistance from the

agencies, no job leads, and no modeling employment. In numerous instances, the potential models did not even receive the photographs they had paid for. The companies simply packed up and left town.

How to spot the scam

It may not be easy to recognize a modeling scam because many of the advertising claims and practices may resemble those used by legitimate modeling agencies. However, listed below are some common advertising claims that should make you suspicious.

- **"No fee."** If a modeling agency advertises that there is no fee for its services, you should be wary any time you are asked to pay. Most legitimate agencies make money only by taking a commission from their models' work. An exception, however, is that you may be charged for your picture to be in an agency book that they send to clients who hire models. Make sure you pay only your portion of the printing costs. But before you pay any money, ask to see a copy of the agency's previous books and the list of clients to whom they were sent. Most legitimate agencies will provide you with this information. It is a good idea to

check with some of the agency's clients to determine whether they have hired any of the company's models.

- **"Earn high salaries."** Only experienced, top models can expect to receive large salaries.
- **"Work full or part time."** The hours of a model are uneven and sporadic. You will not have the flexibility to choose your own hours.

✳Fast Facts✳

- Be wary of an agency that requires you to pay for photographs or pay an upfront fee in order to represent you.
- Check out all claims made in agency advertisements, sales presentations, and literature.
- Ask for the names, addresses, and phone numbers of models who work through the agency and clients who have used its models. Contact the models and clients to verify the information.
- Keep copies of all important papers, such as your contract and agency literature. Be sure to get all verbal promises in writing.

- **“Real people types should apply.”** Some ads encourage people of all shapes, sizes, and ages to apply for commercial modeling work that involves the sale of a product. Remember, modeling opportunities are limited even in large cities. Opportunities do exist for “real people” models, but they are rare.

Because it may be difficult to recognize a modeling agency scam only from advertising claims, watch if agencies use any of the following tactics.

- **Charge you money to take their classes, before you are eligible for modeling work.** A legitimate modeling agency may provide instruction on applying makeup or walking, but most do not charge you for classes. An exception to this is when a modeling agency also serves as a modeling school. A modeling school does charge for classes, but that is a separate function from finding you work as a model.
- **Conduct an unprofessional photo shoot.** Once a modeling agency agrees to represent you, you will need photographs for your portfolio. In the larger modeling markets, such as New York or Los Angeles, the photographs typically are taken in separate photo sessions, each using different clothes, makeup, and hairstyles. And often a model’s portfolio is put together with photographs from more than one photographer. In smaller markets, all photographs may be shot in one session by one photographer, but you should still look different in all your photographs by wearing a variety of cosmetics, clothes, and hairstyles. You may want to shop

around for a photographer that best suits your portfolio needs.

- **Require a particular photographer.** If the modeling agency requires you to work with a particular photographer, chances are the photographer is working with the modeling agency, and they are splitting the fee. A legitimate modeling agency may recommend that you work with a certain photographer, but be skeptical if they are insistent.

How to protect yourself

The best protection against losing money to a phony modeling agency is to take precautions. The following list may help you reduce your chances of losing money.

- Realistically assess your chances for being a model. Ask yourself: was I chosen by the agency because they believe I can make money for them—or just because I can afford to pay money to them?
- If you cannot verify the agency’s credentials and the agency is asking for money in advance, you are better off saying no. Check out all claims made in agency advertisements, sales presentations, and literature. For example, if they say they are the largest modeling agency in the country, contact other modeling agencies and ask if this is true.
- Be suspicious of agencies that require models to pay fees, including fees for agency books, by cash or money order only. This is a strong signal that the agency is interested in taking your money, not in representing you as a model.

- Ask for the names, addresses, and phone numbers of models who work through the agency and clients who have used its models. Contact the models and clients to verify the information.
- Keep copies of all important papers, such as your contract and agency literature. Be sure to get all verbal promises in writing. You may need these if you have a dispute with the agency.

Where to go for help

If you have paid money to a modeling agency, and believe they are involved in a scam, first contact the company and request a refund. If you are not satisfied, call the toll-free hotline of the Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection, (800) 422-7128. Also, contact the advertising manager of the newspaper that ran the ad you answered. For ethical and practical reasons, the advertising manager may be interested to learn about any problems you have had with the agency.

For more information, or to file a complaint, contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection at:

(800) 422-7128

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(From the FTC brochure “Facts for Consumers: Modeling Agency Scams”)