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ALERT!

I recently received a text claiming I won a \$1,000 Target gift card. For a split second, I felt excited, thinking that a \$1,000 gift card several weeks before Christmas would be great news! However, since I had not entered any contests to win a Target gift card, I did a quick Google search and learned this is a scam.

I decided to call the number from which the text I received was sent. A recording informed me that the voicemail box for **“Ripping People Off”** is full.

While my experience gave me a good laugh, not everyone is as fortunate. If you follow the instructions in the text to claim your gift card, iPad or other alleged prize, you could end up agreeing to expensive, unwanted services or even giving a scammer your personal information.

According to the Akron Better Business Bureau, the gift card text scam picks up around the holiday season. That explains why I’m not the only person in my office to receive one of these texts this month.

PCMag.com offers the following tips to avoid being scammed by texts:

1. Don’t respond to texts from unknown senders.
2. Be aware that text apps often incur additional fees. Signing up for a joke-of-the-day or daily horoscope service can include hidden fees.
3. Carefully review your phone bill every month. Make sure you’re not being charged for extra services. Do you see phrases such as “premium content” or “direct bill charge”? Those could be signs of a scam.
4. Tell your phone service carrier to block third-party charges.
5. Don’t click on links. Scam texts include a link for you to claim your prize. Clicking on that link can provide the scammer with your personal information or sign you up for unwanted services.
6. Discuss cell phone safety with your family. Make sure everyone on your cell phone plan is familiar with the prevalence of text scams and how to avoid them.

Remember, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

If you would like to be added to our e-mail list to receive alerts and other useful information from my office, please call (330) 643-2796.

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