

Common-Sense Security Tips to Detect Scammers



Common-Sense Security Tips from Fran Blanco

In the last two days I received two scam calls. It's not surprising. Experian reports that in 2018, there were 47,567 scams added to the Better Business Bureau (BBB) Scam TrackerSM, a 5% increase over 2017. Hopefully, with a few common-sense security tips, you'll be prepared to detect scammers and protect your personal identity and funds.

Scam Calls Detected

The first scam call, on my personal cell, was from the "Social Security Administration." The caller thinly masked a widespread scheme to extort funds. I quickly saw it coming, so I toyed with the individual on the phone. He was exceptionally rude and accused me of wasting his time. Obviously, I "wasn't smart or educated" because I wasn't listening to his threats. Hard to believe, but true.

The second call came today. These folks spoke with a sense of urgency, advising me to book hotel rooms for the New Jersey League of Municipalities (NJLM) conference in November, six months in advance. They took me through a series of questions like, "How many folks are staying overnight? What are the dates? Queen or King beds?" location of the hotel, etc.

This is an event I plan to attend this year. And, it all sounded reputable until I got to the online portal to book the hotels. An unusual "hello sign" was the first clue. When I asked to pause and get back to them because I was late to a meeting, I got the hard close. That was my final tip off. Google then provided me confirmation of the truth that I suspected. It was a scam.

I'm sharing my experiences for two reasons. First, these are great stories that illustrate some all-too-common ways that people get scammed. And second, both stories show how scammers can be detected with a little common sense.



Social Security Employee Scam

In the first case, I found the Social Security scam easy to detect because of their obvious lack of professionalism. Public agency employees are trained on how to deal with people. So, when someone becomes rude if you question their authenticity, it's time to hang up.

I would generalize that to say, if something doesn't feel right, hang up.

Regarding the SSA scam, the Office of the Inspector General website says this about scammers who impersonate SSA employees:

The intent of this type of call may be to steal your identity and/or money from your bank accounts. The caller generally asks you for personal information such as your Social Security number, date of birth, your mother's maiden name, or your bank or financial account information. The impersonator may state that "the SSA computers are down" or may refer to enrollment in the Medicare prescription drug program.

You should not provide any of this information to these individuals.

Furthermore, the AARP gives these **warning signs** to tip you off to SSA scammers:

- You get an unsolicited call from someone claiming to work for SSA, unless you have already been in contact with the agency.
- The caller asks for your Social Security number — something an actual SSA employee wouldn't do.

- A call or email threatens consequences, such as arrest, loss of benefits or suspension of your Social Security number, if you do not provide a payment or personal information.



Trade Show Hotel Booking Scam

It seems that trade show housing scammers, like those who called me, are running rampant this year. To illustrate, the NAFA Fleet Management Association includes this information on their trade show website:

Hotel Warning!

NAFA does NOT use any telemarketing or email campaigns in regards to booking hotel rooms in Louisville.

NAFA WARNING: Beware of Unauthorized Housing Provider Solicitations

NAFA brings many fleet leaders and vendors together from around the world. With that volume of travelers, third-party lodging companies, some of which have proven to be scammers, take notice and begin soliciting potential attendees for lodging and travel services.

LOOK OUT for these Unauthorized Housing Provider WARNING Signs:

- Receiving an email or a phone call that is NOT from NAFA.
- An unforgiving cancellation policy.
- Little to no contact information on their website and a failure to respond when you attempt to contact them.

The warning is followed by a list of 25, yes 25, "Unauthorized Housing Providers." I also found complaints against the company that contacted me, Trade Show Planners, LLC on the BBB website.

Share Common-Sense Security Tips

The common-sense security tips and scam warning signs listed by NAFA could easily be applied to any trade show hotel booking situation. This is great information to know. Share it with your friends and co-workers, especially those who will be attending trade shows within the next year.

We are all blessed with some degree of common sense. These days we should trust our common sense to be able to detect scammers and protect ourselves.

As I learned from acting on my suspicions and checking things out, a few common-sense security tips go a long way to protecting your identity and hard-earned funds.

In business, as well as our personal lives, we should be vigilant in protecting valuable business assets and customer data. [Information governance](#) is growing as a discipline to be practiced by all firms. The data [records management experts](#) at Messaging Architects and IT security professionals at eMazzanti Technologies stand ready to help organizations [strengthen the organization's cyber-defense](#).

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