

Chain Emails: Claims and Facts

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

Claim: “The more people you send the [chain] email to, the more money you *can* make.”

Fact: By the time you receive a chain email, your chances of making money are nil — whether you send it to a few people or to hundreds. In fact, not only will you *not* make money, you probably will lose what you put in. That’s because the earnings obtained from participating in a pyramid scheme (which is what chain letters are) are derived mainly from recruiting other customers outside the chain. Eventually, there’s no one left to recruit into positions below you, and the scheme falls apart.

Claim: “This is not a chain letter, but a perfectly legal money-making opportunity.”

Fact: Any chain letter that promises any kind of return is illegal, and if you start or forward a chain letter, you could be prosecuted for mail fraud and face legal action from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). Six individuals found this out recently when the FTC sued them for promoting a money making chain email scheme. They have agreed not to participate in similar marketing schemes and to refund the money they received.

Claim: “You have just received information that can give you financial freedom for the rest of your life with ‘NO RISK’ and ‘A \$20 INVESTMENT.’”

Fact: Few people, if any, *ever* make money without some risk — whether it involves an investment of time or money.

Claim: “You can earn \$50,000 or more in the next 90 days sending email. Seem Impossible? Read on for details. Is there a catch? NO!!! There is no catch.”

Fact: Does this sound too good to be true? You bet it does. If it were true, wouldn’t everyone be doing the same thing?

Claim: “I had received this program before. I deleted it, but later I wondered if I should have given it a try. Of course, I had no idea who to contact to get another copy, so I had to wait until I got the same email from someone else....11 months passed, then luckily it came again....I did not delete this one! I made more than \$490,000 on my first try and all the money came within 22 weeks.”

Fact: Personal testimonies, like this, can be hard to prove. They may be made up. And even if a testimonial is true, it may represent only one person’s experience — not a significant enough sample of users from which you can draw any realistic conclusions.