



SCAM ALERT



A scam Facebook page offering the site's users a \$1,000 Ikea gift card took in nearly 40,000 victims Friday. According to Computrworld.com, It's the latest example of a new and pernicious trend on the social-networking site as scammers -- usually disreputable online marketers trying to earn revenue by generating Web traffic -- have flooded Facebook with these fake gift card pages over the past months.

In late March, a similar \$1,000 Ikea gift card scam took in more than 70,000 victims, and just last week another scam Facebook page offering a \$500 Whole Foods gift certificate was widely reported.

Friday's scam page had taken in more than 37,000 users by 11:30 a.m. Pacific Time, offering them a \$1,000 gift certificate in exchange for promoting Ikea to their friends. At that time, the page was gaining new fans at the rate of about 5,000 per hour. The promotion, the page said, was only available for one day.

To participate, users must become a fan of the fake Ikea page, hosted on Facebook, and then invite all their friends to become fans. They are then directed to an affiliate marketing page hosted by GiftDepotDirect.com, where they are asked personal information such as name, address, date of birth and home telephone number.

After that step, the victim is told to sign up for two online marketing offers -- these ones with legitimate Web sites such as Netflix and CreditReport.com -- in order to claim the gift card.

The promised cards in these scams never show up, according to Audri Lanford, a co-founder of the Scambusters Web site, in an interview Tuesday before the latest scam page surfaced. In fact, the victim's personal information could be used for identity theft, or worse, her computer could be hacked. "Why people would give this [information] is beyond me, but they do," she said.

Earlier this week, Facebook spokesman Simon Axten said that fake gift cards are a small problem on Facebook, but he couldn't say how many people had become fans of these scam pages. Facebook is, however, developing an automated system to remove the pages, Axten said via e-mail. "We're quickly removing the groups and pages in many cases before they go viral."

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