



There's an old cliché that seniors are the most vulnerable to scams, because we're more trusting than younger people. However, one of the biggest scams in history, Bernie Madoff's \$50 billion Ponzi scheme bilked millions from supposedly aware younger people. They included actor Kevin Bacon, producers Steven Spielberg and Jeffrey Katsenberg, as well as other wealthy and supposedly savvy young victims.

They put misguided trust in the sleazy carnival pitchman because they believed his wild promises of big returns on their investments. Of course, it's easy to ridicule those investors for being so vulnerable as to entrust billions to this con artist. However, every day, both rich and poor, young and old, fall for scams they should know to avoid. If an online ad or phone call offers you a travel deal for free, you'll eventually overpay for it. Example: Round-trip flight and two nights in Las Vegas free. Forget it. The small print requires you to listen to a sales pitch at a long, pressured presentation. And, of course, later be billed for hundreds of bucks.

Another scam is timeshare. Of course, some timeshare communities are legit. However, if you're a senior couple wandering through an entrance of a Vegas hotel lately, you're almost sure to be accosted by a smirking guy or gal who offers you all kinds of free stuff. It could be buffets, nights at the hotel and cash. All you have to do to get the goodies is attend a sit-down timeshare pitch.

When arriving, you're herded into a room with other seniors and then subjected to a hard sell. If timeshare ownership of an apartment appeals to you, do research. If you really want a place to

crash every year for two weeks in such vacation spots as Vegas, Malibu, Big Sur, Lake Tahoe or Key West, call legitimate timeshare companies directly.

Don't sign up until you know the TOTAL costs, including association and maintenance dues, as well as other facts. Review the entire deal with your personal attorney and adult children.

Another scam is an email, phone call or letter from some alleged attorney in Africa, England, Russia or the Caribbean. They've recently found your long-lost relative's account or unclaimed money in your name in a foreign bank.

Usually the figure is somewhere between 100,000 and a million bucks. If you bite, you're asked to send processing money of from \$1,000 to \$20,000. We hear tragic stories of elderly people who've fallen for the scam. Of course, once their "good intentions" money is sent, they never again hear about the big bucks they were supposed to receive.

Every sales pitch should be taken with caution. For example, hotel rooms, flights and combination packages are advertised with one "low, low" price, but all come with at least a 15 to 25 percent increase for taxes and other piled-ons.

Of course, scams are not only for timeshares. TV infomercials scream pitches for miracle cures, cars, super glues, lotions, diet pills and other obvious junk. Also, there are the TV charities. If you have any doubts about such pitches, don't buy or contribute unless you check the source with the Better Business Bureau or other protection agency.

When contacted by phone, email or snail mail, whether the offer is for travel or anything else, just use your common senior citizen sense. Don't throw away good money on bad scams and other false deals.