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Recently our agency received a question from a Georgia consumer about whether the text message she had received claiming she'd won a Walmart gift card was legitimate or not. The fact is, it is highly unlikely that this kind of text message is legitimate.

Scams involving purported "free" gift cards have been reported throughout the country. In March, the Better Business Bureau reported a scam in which many people received text messages promising "free" Walmart and Best Buy gift cards. One such message read, "Walmart $1,000 gift card for the first 1000 users to go to [link] and enter code 2938." Another said, "You have been randomly selected for a Best Buy gift. Get your $1,000 gift card at [link]." Neither of these offers panned out.

This type of scam is known as "smishing", a type of "phishing" scam where the scammer sends you a text message, instead of an e-mail. If you click on the link in the text message, you'll be required to provide personal information such as your credit card number or social security number before you can claim any gift card. The scammers then use this information to steal your identity.

If the link provided in any text (or e-mail) message doesn't lead you directly to a page on the company's main website, it's more likely than not that the offer is a scam. The most popular website being used in this particular smishing scam, for example, is www.walmartgift.mobi (rather than the store's actual site, which is www.walmartstores.com).

Walmart does give away legitimate gift cards to the winners of drawings for receipt surveys, and these drawings take place four times per year. However, the winners of these gift cards are always notified by certified mail, not via email or text message.

Walmart, along with most other major reliable retailers, will never send you a text, telephone, or e-mail message asking for your personal information.

Consumers should not respond to any messages that ask for this kind of personal information. Also, you should never click on any links provided in the message. The scammers who send these messages are just trying to get your personal information. Walmart's current policy is that it never asks consumers, either online or in e-mails, to complete online surveys in order to receive a gift card. And Walmart will not send you any e-mails or surveys that require you to make a purchase or pay money as a condition for participating.

Consumers receiving this type of text message should report it by forwarding the text message to 7726 (“S-P-A-M”). You can also report it to your state consumer protection agency and to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) at www.ftc.gov or by calling 1-877-FTC-HELP.