

# ALLIANCE AGAINST BAIT & CLICK

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## **Alert for On-Line Holiday Shoppers: Don't Get Scrooged by SCADS**

*Alliance Against Bait & Click Offers Tips to Help Shoppers Avoid Falling Prey to  
Deceptive Sponsored Links*

NEW YORK, NY – More than one in three Americans will bargain hunt on the web for holiday gifts.<sup>1</sup> Even the savviest shopper can be tricked by the deceptive online ads lurking on popular search engines.

Scam ads, or “scads” lure online shoppers with search ads highlighting popular brands that the site may not even actually offer. The result? “Bait and click.”

“Scads may trick holiday shoppers into paying for things they don't want, an especially egregious practice during this holiday season when so many shoppers are trying to make every dollar count for their families,” said Jarrod Agen, Chief Spokesperson for the Alliance Against Bait & Click (AABC).

Scads reflect the very different advertising rules on-line versus off-line. You can't dress up like Santa Claus outside your shopping mall with a sign for the Salvation Army, and then pocket the change or give the cash to someone else, but this is essentially what deceptive marketers are doing online.

Regulations prohibit advertisements in newspapers or magazines from misleading shoppers with fake promotions, but search engines like Google, Yahoo! and MSN forego similar safeguards. In fact, search engines profit from scads because by allowing deceptive ads, they can sell more clicks and received increased revenues.

But there are steps that shoppers can take to avoid getting scrooged by scads.

The Alliance Against Bait & Click, the organization that educates consumers about deceptive sponsored links, offers on-line shoppers the following advice on how to spot scads:

Scads usually look like legitimate ads. There are three components to an ad: The headline, body and url. These should all be consistent with the product you are looking for.

On-line shoppers should look closely at all three components:

- Does the body copy of the ad seem appropriate? Does it reference the brand or product you are looking for?

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<sup>1</sup> According to a study by the National Retail Federation.

- Does the headline correspond to the link? For example, does the headline promote a cell phone brand, but the link seems to be about stereo equipment?
- Is the offer realistic? If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Upon landing on a site internet users should also ask themselves whether it is the site they were looking for or thought they were going to end up at. If it's not what they were looking for, its safest to leave.

"Deceptive on-line marketers and the search engines who enable them have definitely earned a place on the 'naughty list' this holiday season," said Agen. "Holiday shoppers who know how to spot scads can help stop scads. The reality is that the less people who click on scads, the quicker they'll go away."

The risks of scads to online holiday shoppers involve more than wasted time or frustration because scads often take unsuspecting internet users to unsecured sites - exposing them to fraud, viruses, and spyware.

Once an internet user has been tricked into clicking on the scad there can be dangers. Scads have been shown to lead to twice as many sites possessing spyware or false marketing claims than unsponsored search results<sup>2</sup>. Consumers may also be charged for unwanted services or lured to sites by outrageous and false claims. For example, several scads direct users to sites that charge for *Firefox*, a popular free web browser, while others promise incredible discounts on products and services they have no ability to provide.

The website of the Alliance Against Bait & Click (AABC), [www.stopscads.org](http://www.stopscads.org), focuses on arming on-line consumers with the information and tools they need to avoid scads and safeguard their search. AABC, a coalition of leading e-commerce marketers and academic experts on search advertising, was formed to raise awareness of "bait & click", the practice which lures consumers to potentially dangerous sites by using unauthorized and unaffiliated brand names in scads.

In addition to providing tips and tools to teach online shoppers about how to spot and avoid scads, the AABC website also provides avenues for action, including a petition to the FTC calling for tighter controls and contacting the search engines directly to report scads and press for tighter filters.

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<sup>2</sup> "Sponsored results contain 2.4 times as many risky sites as organic sites." The State of Search Engine Safety. McAfee Inc. June 4, 2007.