

# STAYWELL

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## The Science of Scamming

Have you ever clicked on a link to a webpage and as you click to exit, a little box pops up that reads, "Are you sure you want to exit?" You click "Yes," but it will not close. Or how about an email with a video presentation that shows an individual drawing on a white board. You try to fast forward, but it only allows play and pause. You have to listen to the entire presentation and it seems to go on forever!

Technology has changed how information is obtained. Numerous times, the information received is not factual or truthful. A favorite is the ad that claims something is proven by scientific evidence, yet there is no mention where to find the research since it does not exist. Just because something has been proven to be scientific does not necessarily mean the outcome is good.

The phrase *scientifically proven* does not mean proven to be healthy. Science has proven how gullible people are more than it has proven health products perform as promised. People tend to think that if something is printed or written then it must be true.

Here is a good example. A few years ago a colorful salesman came knocking on the door. He was skilled in his verbiage and enthusiastic about a "clean anything" product. He claimed his product was safe for anyone, but tough on anything. He even tasted the product to demonstrate its safety. The sales pitch was, "you can only get it today with cash or credit." I kindly refused and asked for a



pamphlet to read about the product. Interestingly, he would not give me a pamphlet unless the product was purchased. However, he did offer a number to call to validate that he was a salesman for the company. Seeing my continued reluctance, he then showed invoices with the neighbors' names on them. I still refused. A product that "cleaned everything perfectly" sounded too good to be true. After the salesman left, I did some research. I wasn't surprised with what I discovered. It was a scam!

This incident reminds me of a similar salesman who used the same tactics on the neighbors over 20 years ago. When the product arrived, it did not work like it had in the demonstration. In fact, the product didn't work at all. The neighbors came to our house to see if the product worked for us. They had been shown an invoice with our name to help convince them to purchase the product. But we hadn't bought it. They were scammed! Things have not changed much today. Scam artists are just craftier with social media leading the way.



How a product is marketed is also very scientific. Studies have been conducted about what draws people in and what sticks in a person's mind the most. A hilarious example happened a few years ago. My 13-year-old son was whistling a very happy tune from a commercial as he walked around the house. When I asked him why, he said, "I don't know where I heard it. I just can't get it out of my head." For those who have seen the commercial, it is the tune "Smiling Bob" whistled because he was now "naturally enhanced" by a wonder product in a catchy commercial. The

founder of this company and his mother are now serving 25 years in a federal prison for credit card fraud. They have been ordered to forfeit \$500 million in assets!

It is amazing how easy it is to create an internet scam. Reviews and testimonials are great ways to win support for a scam. A person can sit in front of a computer and type thousands of these scams up in a short time and all are fake.



Americans especially can be vulnerable. When a celebrity who has neither knowledge nor experience with a product endorses it, Americans will spend billions of dollars annually to obtain the product even if it does nothing.

A big scam out there right now is the detox scam. Scammers will use legitimate medical terms, but in a different marketing manner. The claim sounds believable and looks believable, but the way it is presented, it preys on the vulnerability of people. A person will then pay for a non-medical treatment that has not been scientifically proven or does not even exist.

Individuals still tend to buy the "magic elixir" from the scam artist in the medicine wagon. It happened generations ago and the same old tricks still happen today. Billions of dollars are lost from willing consumers who believe the cunning advertising of most "natural supplements." Many of these products have been proven to show there is no health benefit at all, but the way the product is marketed, it is bought without question of legitimacy. To help avoid such scams follow the tips listed below:

- Scrutinize advertisements. If it is "miraculous," it is usually worthless.
- Research the product and business.
- Use legitimate sources.

- Ask for research references.
- Refer to the Utah State Attorney General's Office or Better Business Bureau at [www.bbb.org](http://www.bbb.org).
- Search for evidence-based studies.
- Testimonials are not scientific evidence.
- Just because someone says it is true does not make it so.
- Avoid salespeople who seek you rather than you seeking them.
- Overlook products requiring a person to sign up and then cancel the product to avoid future billing. A "free" trial may not be a free.
- Do not sign up for anything that claims a free trial and requires a credit card number to have the product come in the mail. These are always a scam!
- Use patience. If there is pressure to decide right now, decide "No."
- If it sounds too good to be true then it is!

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