# Don’t let fake businesses squash your side gig goals

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We are living in what many experts have called “the gig economy.” With inflation, rising costs, and the popularity of flexible work, side hustles are becoming a way of life for many Americans. In fact, a recent [Bankrate survey](https://www.bankrate.com/loans/small-business/side-hustles-survey/) found that more than one in four U.S. adults has a second source of income. However, as more people look for side gigs, scammers are looking for more people to exploit, hoping to lure desperate job seekers with fake opportunities that sound too good to pass up.

These fake job scams have become a plague on the gig economy, and Better Business Bureau is warning gig-seekers about the risks of engaging with fraudulent businesses. According to [BBB’s Scam Tracker](https://www.bbb.org/scamtracker) data, since the beginning of 2025, there have been more than 16,000 reports of fake job scams, costing gig-seekers a combined total of $34.6 million in losses.

The fake businesses in these reports typically target victims via text, social media message, or email, offering high pay for little work. They are effective in using psychology tricks and playing to their target's vulnerabilities, but knowing what to watch out for can help you stay one step ahead. Here is how you can spot red flags to separate fake opportunities from real ones.

## Fake-gig red flags

* **Too much money for too little work**: The first warning sign, and the quickest one to spot, is that the business or employer offers an opportunity to earn hundreds or thousands of dollars from quick and easy tasks. Some of the most common tasks involve re-shipping packages, mystery shopping, or posting online reviews. Keep in mind that “too good to pass up” usually also means “too good to be true.”
* **Limited online presence and negative reviews:** Always look up any business you plan to work for, buy from, or engage with. If a business does not have any information available online or if all the information points to them treating people unethically, that’s your cue to leave that opportunity alone and find something more credible.
* **Upfront payments**: Many fake gig-opportunity businesses will convince you to pre-pay them to qualify for the job or task they are supposedly offering to you. They most commonly will say the money you are paying them is for essential job equipment, training, or starter kits.   
  Real jobs don’t require you to “pay in” to get started. If you’re asked to pay to qualify for a gig, task, or job training, it is safest to just walk away.
* **Overpayment schemes**: Another common tactic is overpayment. Fraudsters may send a fake check for more than the agreed amount (claiming it was an accident) and then ask you to deposit the check into your bank account and send back the extra amount via wire transfer. A few days later, the check bounces; the money you sent was real, but the check in your account is fake. Never deposit a check that is for the wrong amount, and always be cautious of overpayments.

## How to side-gig safely

Now that you know what gig employment scams commonly look like and how they operate, here are a few key habits to keep you safe:

* **Pause on promises of “easy money.”** If the payout doesn’t match the effort, avoid it!
* **Do a quick credibility check.** Search the company’s name along with terms like “scam,” “review,” or “complaint.” Use [BBB.org](https://www.bbb.org/) or the FTC’s site to confirm whether the business has a legitimate presence and history.
* **Don’t pay to get paid.** According to BBB Scam Tracker reports, requests for money before you’ve earned anything are among the top warning signs of a job scam.
* **Watch for overpayment tricks.** The Federal Trade Commission has tracked millions lost through this type of scheme.
* **Report and protect if things go wrong.** If you suspect fraud, file a report with BBB’s Scam Tracker and the FTC. If you’ve shared financial or personal details, contact your bank immediately, set up fraud monitoring, and consider a credit freeze.

## Get your “gig” on

We’ll end with a more optimistic note; the point of this article is not to scare you away from side-gigs altogether, but to help you be more aware and cautious of “too-good-to-be-true" job offers that can turn your hard work into a loss.

There are ample side gig opportunities that are honest, and they can be a [legitimate way to bring in extra income](https://www.bbb.org/article/news-releases/26976-bbb-tip-watch-out-for-side-hustle-scams). By remaining mindful of the red flags and taking a few minutes to research businesses using BBB.org as a starting point, you can move forward with side gig opportunities confidently.

In short, starting your side gig starts with knowing the people and businesses you are working with. You can learn more about how to vet business opportunities, find trusted business partners, and grow your side gig or small business safely and ethically at BBB.ORG.

Now, go get your “gig” on!