Read the Pitch

A Plain Guide to Spotting Misleading Income Claims, Business Offers and Money-Making Courses

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CHAPTER 1

Why Big Income Promises Work

A promise of income succeeds because it answers a real need. Rent comes due, wages stay flat and a second paycheck sounds like relief. A pitch that names a large monthly figure speaks to that need directly, and the figure is easy to remember. A pitch that says results vary is harder to remember and easier to ignore.

The Federal Trade Commission describes the pattern in consumer guidance on business opportunities. Offers of this kind often try to grab attention by talking about how much money a person can make, and the FTC says the earnings described are sometimes exaggerated or even flat-out phony (FTC, 2023). The agency also warns that promises of quitting a job, working from home and living lavishly often are false (FTC, 2023).

Part of the appeal is the story that comes with the number. A seller shows a single person who started from nothing and reached a big monthly income. The story is vivid and it may even be true. What it cannot show is how many people bought the same program and ended up somewhere else. A single success proves that success is possible. It says nothing about the odds.

Another part of the appeal is speed. Offers often suggest that results come quickly and with little effort. The FTC's older advertising guide uses phrases such as work part-time from home and quick and easy as examples of the language to examine closely (FTC, 2006). The same guide says that ads promising a big payout with little or no risk are usually a telltale sign of fraud (FTC, 2006).

A reader who understands why these pitches work is better placed to resist them. The pull of a large number, a single success story and a quick timeline are tools of persuasion, and each can be answered with

a question. The rest of the book supplies those questions, beginning with a clear definition of what is being claimed.