

The “Scam”

The “phoney toner” scam usually involves a series of phone calls. In the first set, the caller hopes to find a new employee, temp, or person who will freely give information. Posing as the company’s vendor or perhaps as a survey taker, the caller asks the employee to read the make and model number off the nearest printer. Faced with such a harmless-seeming request—and not realizing a legitimate vendor would probably know the information already—the employee complies.

The bite comes a little later. Again posing as a vendor or a representative of a warehouse, the scam artist contacts someone in the company. If it’s the same employee, he or she may be reminded of the earlier conversation as if the hustler was an old friend. The employee hears about a tempting offer on toner cartridges that just happen to fit his or her printer. (The actual component, of course, can vary, but toner is common.)

Naturally, there’s a limited supply, or a limited time, so the employee is pressured to agree to have a case or two sent out. Again, the caller may strive to make it seem that he or she is already an approved vendor and just needs a verbal agreement to authorize the sale.

The resulting delivery contains the surprise. Perhaps it’s cut-rate toner sold at a name-brand price. Perhaps a “case” of cartridges contains far fewer units than expected. Or you could discover that the wonderful per-unit charge you were quoted referred to individual cartridges, not cases. In any case, the company is overcharged for the product. In the most egregious instances, companies receive invoices for products they never ordered or even received.

If someone complains, the scammers might resort to bluster, contending that the invoice is legitimate and that failure to pay could result in a lawsuit or worse. Or they might pretend that the salesperson “forgot” about a discount and offer the cartridges for a reduced—but still highly profitable—price.