The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) sends out consumer alerts frequently. 

You can subscribe here Consumer Alerts from the FTC subscribe@subscribe.ftc.gov

In July of this year they sent out an alert warning against Mystery Shopping Scams. ("Mystery shopping", is when people are paid to pretend to be shopping to get information on business practice, products and quality of service, etc.)

Mystery shop ’til you drop? Not so fast

by Lisa Lake
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Who wouldn’t love getting paid to shop and dine at cool places and then review them? Whether you’re a student looking for a summer job or someone wanting to start a side or full-time business, mystery shopping sounds like an exciting option. But while some mystery shopping opportunities are legitimate, many are scams that rob you, not pay you.

Read more >

Articles provide the consumer with tips and resources to help him/her navigate the legitimacy of a company. For example, regarding the Mystery Shopping venture:

Here are a few ways to spot and avoid mystery shopping scams:

- Search the company with the words “review,” “complaint” or “scam.”

- Remember: Honest companies pay you to work for them, not charge you. If the company asks you to pay upfront to get the opportunity, walk away. No real job opportunity, including mystery shopping, involves paying for the job.

- Don’t pay companies for “certifications,” directories or “job guarantees,” all of which are usually worthless. Companies asking you to pay for such things are likely scammers.

- If you’re asked to deposit checks into your bank account and send money back to pay for courses, fees or anything else, stop. This is a fake check scam. When the check bounces, you’ll be out of the money you sent and may have to pay more to the bank.

- Never wire money or buy gift cards for a mystery shopping assignment or any job opportunity. Those are sure signs of a scam.
If you're looking for legitimate mystery shopping jobs, check out the Mystery Shopping Providers Association for a database of authentic companies. But if you spot any scams, report them to the FTC at ftc.gov/complaint and your state attorney general's office.

Going to the Mystery Shopping Providers Association and a quick search for New York companies...

...yields 5 companies: