

TECHNOLOGY TIMES

Insider Tips To Make Your Business Run Faster, Easier And More Profitably

HOLIDAY SCAMS IN DISGUISE:

WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR WHEN DONATING ONLINE



Even in the best of seasons, bad actors hover around generosity. But during the holidays—when giving spikes and emotions run high—they become even bolder.

A few years ago, authorities shut down a major tele-funding scheme after uncovering 1.3 billion deceptive donation calls that brought in more than \$110 million from well-meaning donors.

(Federal Trade Commission)

Around the same time, Cornell University researchers discovered over 800 social media accounts running fake fundraisers, luring people toward fraudulent “charity” campaigns on Facebook, X, and Instagram.

For law firms and small businesses, one mistake in charitable giving can do more than cost you money.

It can put your firm’s name next to fraud, damage the credibility you’ve worked hard to build, and weaken the trust of clients, partners, and your community.

Here’s how to vet holiday fundraisers, spot red flags, and protect both your goodwill and your reputation this season.

How To Vet a Fundraiser Before You Donate

Before your firm or business contributes to any holiday fundraiser, make sure the campaign can clearly answer the essentials:

- Who is running the fundraiser, and what is their direct connection to the beneficiary?
- How will the money be used—and over what timeline?
- Who controls the withdrawals, and is there a transparent process for getting funds to the intended recipient?
- Do people close to the beneficiary (family, colleagues, community members) publicly validate the campaign?

If any of this information is missing, vague, or hard to verify, pause. Ask questions.

Silence, inconsistencies, or evasive responses are major red flags.

Red Flags That Often Signal Fraud

If your team spots any of the following, stop and investigate before donating:

- Misleading, inconsistent, or clearly false details on the fundraiser page

- Funds that aren’t being used for the stated purpose, or no updates showing progress
- Impersonation attempts or fundraising pages that copy someone else’s story
- Narratives that feel overly polished, dramatic, or emotionally manipulative

If you notice more than one of these red flags, it’s best to avoid donating and report the fundraiser to the platform immediately.

Vetting Charities (Not Just Crowdfunds)

Even well-established charities can have questionable practices, so due diligence matters just as much here—especially for firms and small businesses that need to maintain trust and professionalism.

Look for:

- Transparent program descriptions, financial summaries, and annual reports
- Clear details on how much of your donation goes to programs vs. administrative overhead
- A clean reputation—no charity name paired with search terms like “fraud,” “scam,” or “complaints”

If a charity provides limited information or has a trail of negative reviews, treat it as a sign to proceed carefully

continued on page 2...

Get More Free Tips, Tools And Services At Our Website: www.ismgrid.com

...continued from cover

Common Tactics Charity Fraudsters Use

Stay alert for tactics that often show up in deceptive fundraisers:

- Requests for gift cards, wire transfers, or cryptocurrency.
- Legitimate charities typically accept credit cards or checks.
- Websites without “https.”
Missing the “s” indicates insecure data transmission—never enter payment details on a site like that.
- High-pressure tactics.
“Donate now!” Urgency is designed to stop you from slowing down and verifying the information.
- Claims that you’ve already pledged or donated.
Always confirm internally before sending money—fraudsters rely on confusion.

Even convincing websites, polished branding, and sentimental stories can be used to disguise malicious intent.

Why This Matters for Your Firm or Business

Whether your organisation gives publicly or privately, your generosity becomes part of your brand identity.

When a donation is linked to your firm’s name—through an official contribution or even an employee giving on behalf of the business—it reflects directly on your reputation.

A single donation to a fraudulent campaign can unintentionally pull your firm into a negative story, raising questions about due diligence and internal controls.

But there’s a bigger concern:

The same tactics used in charity scams—urgency, impersonation, fake websites, pressure to act fast—are the exact tactics cybercriminals use in:

- Phishing emails
- Fake invoices
- Wire transfer fraud
- Vendor impersonation scams

Teaching your team how to identify questionable fundraisers isn’t just about protecting charitable dollars.

It sharpens their instincts across the board and strengthens your firm’s overall security posture.

How To Protect Your Firm or Business (And Your Goodwill)

A few simple steps can make your holiday giving safer and smarter:

- **Create a Donation Policy:** Outline how your firm donates, who approves contributions, and what thresholds require additional review.
- **Increase Employee Awareness:** Remind your team to verify fundraisers—especially if they plan to donate using your firm’s name or resources.
- **Use Trusted Channels:** Always donate through official charity websites, not links from unsolicited emails, social posts, or messages.
- **Stay Transparent:** If your organization highlights charitable giving publicly, confirm that the charity is legitimate and properly vetted.
- **Monitor After Donating:** Many reputable charities share impact reports or updates. Make sure funds are being used as promised.

Keep Your Holidays Generous – Not Risky

The holidays are a time to give back, not a time to be caught off guard.

With the right checks, policies, and awareness, you can protect your donations and your reputation.

Make sure your team knows how to identify the warning signs—whether it’s a suspicious fundraiser, a phishing email, or a bogus payment request.

Because the best gift you can give your firm, your clients, and your community is trust that can’t be taken.

“I DIDN’T KNOW”

Unfortunately, That Excuse Doesn’t Replenish Your Bank Account, Resolve A Data Breach Or Erase Any Fines And Lawsuits.

It’s Not “If.” It’s When.

There’s a moment every firm and business dreads...

- The day a cybercriminal slips past your defences and locks down critical case files.
- The day your firm’s banking credentials are compromised.
- The day your clients’ private information—matters you’re trusted to protect—is suddenly exposed.

Cybercriminals evolve their tactics every single day. New scams, new attack methods, new ways to infiltrate your systems and disrupt your operations.
And the only way to stay ahead is simple:

You Must Stay Informed – Consistently.

The more you and your team understand today’s threats, the easier it is to shut them down before they become disasters.

That’s why, for a limited time, we’re offering something designed to keep law firms and small businesses safer with very little effort on your part:

Get Our Free “Cybersecurity Tip of the Week”

Sign up and you’ll receive short, practical, easy-to-read tips straight to your inbox.

Each one is packed with real-world advice your team can use right away to stay one step ahead of cybercriminals.

No jargon. No fluff. Just clear, actionable guidance that strengthens your security—week after week.



CARTOON OF THE MONTH



“All I’m saying is we could be collecting more data than just naughty and nice.”

Get your FREE “Cybersecurity Tip of the Week” at: www.ismgrid.com/cyber-security-tip-of-the-week



BRAND-BUILDING ADVICE FROM KISS CO-FOUNDER GENE SIMMONS

Gene Simmons, legendary KISS co-founder and the mastermind behind the band's merchandising success, shares seven trade secrets that shaped the iconic KISS brand and built his wealth. The same principles he used can absolutely drive growth for your company.

1. Embrace Money Unapologetically

"Every step you take is either going to make you money or cost you money," Simmons said. "I prefer to make money. You have an inferred fiduciary duty to yourself."

2. Work Harder Than Everyone Else

"Some of the least intelligent people I've met are also some of the wealthiest individuals," he said. "The only difference is they work longer and harder. If you do nothing on weekends – that's 104 wasted days a year."

3. Choose Your Circle Wisely

"Get rid of all your loser friends," Simmons warned. "Anybody who wants to go drinking, hanging out – get rid of them. They are vampires. Surround yourself with better-looking, richer, smarter people. Yes, it's surface stuff, but it works."

4. Master Communication And Branding

Clear communication, authority and brand maximisation are essential. "If you've got a brand that works, there are almost no limitations," he said. "KISS has done everything from condoms to caskets. We'll get you coming, and we'll get you going."

5. Diversify Income Streams

"Always have something else that makes you money," Simmons advised. "Passions are fine, but remember – whatever the passion, there's a market."

6. Protect Your Assets

Trademark your business and products. "The first thing in building a business is a nice, clear fence," he said. "Good fences make good neighbours."

7. Approach Life With Fresh Eyes

He urged innovators to think like outsiders. "All businesses were invented in garages," he emphasised. "It's always about passion, vision and people who refuse to quit, no matter how many times they fail."

Keys To Success

For Simmons, success comes from deliberate action and relentless commitment. He believes self-education and financial literacy are foundational. Marketing savvy and brand differentiation, as shown in KISS's evolution, remain critical. He champions income diversification, tax strategy, trademarks and legal structures to safeguard growth.

Most importantly, Simmons insists success isn't about talent or privilege – it's about drive, learning, strategy, ambition and outworking everyone else. "You have a fiduciary duty to educate yourself, to be in the right place with the right thing at the right time," he said. "It's up to you to make life worthwhile and make a lot more money, because you can, and you will."

SHINY NEW GADGET OF THE MONTH

LG Smart InstaView Microwave



Blending innovation with entertainment, the LG Smart InstaView Microwave transforms everyday cooking into a connected experience. Featuring a 27-inch touchscreen, built-in speakers and Wi-Fi connectivity, it brings media streaming and smart functionality right to your kitchen counter. Whether you're following a recipe, watching your favorite show or syncing with other smart appliances, this microwave redefines what a kitchen essential can be. Sleek, modern and multifunctional – it's a tech upgrade your kitchen didn't know it needed.

HOLIDAY TECH ETIQUETTE FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

(Or: How Not To Accidentally Ruin Someone's Day)

The holidays are hectic enough without your technology adding to the chaos. Clients are trying to wrap up end-of-year matters, your staff is balancing court deadlines with family plans, and everyone's stress level is already running high.

The last thing your firm or business needs is to frustrate people with a preventable tech hiccup.

So consider this your "Holiday Tech Etiquette Guide" — a simple way to avoid becoming that office that unintentionally derails someone's day.

1 Update Your Online Hours (Before The First Angry Phone Call)

Picture this: A client hurries across town between meetings because Google says you're open—only to find the doors locked and the office dark. Instant frustration. And now your firm or business looks unreliable, even though it was just a simple update that slipped through the cracks.

Here's what to update before the holiday rush:

- Your Google Business Profile (this one matters the most!)
- Your social channels — Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Yelp
- A website banner or announcement with your holiday schedule
- Apple Maps (yes, plenty of people still rely on it)

Sample message:

"Happy Holidays! Our office will be closed Monday, Dec. 22, through Monday, Jan. 5, so our team can enjoy time with loved ones. We'll reopen Monday morning—well-caffinated, slightly overfed, and ready to assist you."

2 Set Friendly Out-of-Office Replies (That Doesn't Sound Like Robots)

If you're stepping away for a few days, don't leave clients wondering whether their message vanished into the holiday void. A thoughtful auto-reply keeps communication clear and shows you're still attentive—even when you're off the clock. A great out-of-office message is like a good receptionist: warm, professional, and reassuring.

Sample Out-of-Office Message:

"Thanks for your email! Our office will be closed for the Christmas holiday from Dec. 22 through Jan. 5. We'll get back to you as soon as we return (and have had our first cup of coffee).

If your matter is urgent, please call our support line at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Wishing you a safe and happy holiday!"

3 Don't Overshare in Your OOO (No One Needs Your Holiday Itinerary)

Keep your auto-reply focused and simple. Clients don't need to know you're flying to Denver to see Aunt Carol, that your office manager is headed to Cancún or that someone on your team is doing a full "Friendsgiving potluck tour."

Not only is it unnecessary, but sharing too many personal details can create security risks for your firm or business.

Stick to the essentials:

Dates, response expectations, and who to contact in urgent situations.

Save the travel stories for your personal social media, not your inbox.

4 Test Your Phone Systems (Before They Test Your Patience)

Holiday callers are often juggling tight deadlines, family plans, and general end-of-year stress. The last thing they need is a voicemail greeting that's outdated, confusing, or completely mismatched from your actual hours.

Take a minute to double-check your phone system now—before clients end up on a voicemail scavenger hunt.

Pro Tip: Call your own office number.

Seriously — do it. You'd be shocked at how many firms and businesses are still rocking a voicemail greeting from 2019.

Sample Voicemail:

"You've reached [Business Name]. Our office is currently closed for the holiday weekend. Please leave a message, and we'll return your call Monday morning. If your matter is urgent, press 1 to reach our on-call team. Happy Holidays, and thank you for your patience!"

5 Communicate Shipping & Delivery Deadlines (Before the Panic Sets In)

If your firm or business ships documents, client packages, kits, or end-of-year materials, make sure your deadlines are communicated early and often. Post your "order by" or "mail by" dates clearly on your website and send a reminder email so no one is caught off guard.

Delayed deliveries are inconvenient — but missed expectations can seriously damage client relationships. No one wants to explain why an important document, gift, or deliverable isn't showing up until January.

The Bottom Line: Good Etiquette = Happier Clients = Better Business

Holiday tech etiquette isn't complicated.

It's simply about setting clear expectations, communicating like a real person, and respecting your clients' time. A few small updates can prevent unnecessary frustration and keep your firm or business looking organized, reliable, and client-focused.

Remember: The goal isn't just to avoid issues — it's to make your clients feel supported and cared for, even when your office is closed.