

## Scam

*Posted by Peter on 16 March 2007*

Today's podcast introduces the English word "scam". What is a scam? Imagine this situation. I set up a website. The website says that you can buy new digital cameras really cheaply. You are interested. You think you would like to buy one of my cheap cameras. So you click the buttons and enter your credit card number. Then you wait for the camera to arrive. But it doesn't arrive. I have taken your money and disappeared. That is a "scam". Other English nouns that mean more or less the same are "swindle" and "fraud".

Why are we talking about scams today? Well, in Britain there are a number of shows on television which invite people to telephone the show. Sometimes people phone in to answer questions in a quiz. Sometimes they phone in to vote on something - for example on who should win a song competition. The telephone numbers which these TV shows use are "premium rate telephone numbers". That means that the telephone calls cost more than normal calls - sometimes very much more. And the TV company gets part of the money from the call.

Now, speaking personally, I think you have to be either very stupid or very bored to ring a premium rate telephone number on a TV show. But it is a free country. If it makes people happy to spend money in this way, then that is OK. It may be silly, but it is not a scam.

About two weeks ago, however, a news report appeared which said that on one TV show, the [presenters](#) had invited people to telephone the show to win a chance to appear in a quiz. However, the TV company had already secretly chosen the winners. So the viewers were paying for the expensive telephone calls, but none of them could win. It's a scam, said the newspapers. And lots of people agreed.

And then it [emerged](#) that the same sort of thing had happened on other TV shows. Embarrassed TV [executives](#) told viewers that they were very sorry and that it would never happen again. The regulator for premium rate telephone calls started an investigation. It is even possible that the police will look at some of the more serious cases.

Then two days ago, the worst happened. For many years, the BBC have had a children's TV show called Blue Peter. It is quality children's television; it is fun; it is clean; it is wholesome. Parents like it. Most children like it too. A few months ago, there was a quiz on Blue Peter. The presenters asked children to phone in if they thought they knew the answer. Lots of children did phone. They (or, rather, their parents) paid 10p for each call. But there was a technical problem, and none of the calls reached the studio. Instead, the BBC asked a girl in the audience to pretend to be somebody phoning the show. She answered the question correctly and won a prize.

Now, this was a mistake, not a scam. But the BBC were very embarrassed that such a thing could happen on a respected show like Blue Peter. It is like discovering that your grandmother sells illegal drugs. British people generally do not trust or believe politicians or estate agents or used car salesmen. Now we don't trust phone-in TV programmes either.

This is the text of the podcast at <http://www.listen-to-english.com/index.php?id=261>,