



# Consumer Corner

by Illinois Attorney General LISA MADIGAN



## Understanding Rebate Offers

Rebates are often used by retailers and manufacturers as a means of enticing consumers into making a purchase. Offered on a variety of goods, rebates are designed to save consumers money while increasing sales. However, some rebate requirements have become increasingly difficult to complete, often leaving consumers frustrated and without their promised rebates.

**Q.** I recently decided to purchase a new television and have been shopping around for the best price. While making comparisons, I noticed several rebate offers. Would you please explain how rebates work and whether I should consider these offers as I decide which purchase to make?

**A.** There are two types of rebates—those that can be redeemed immediately at the register and those that must be mailed in. The majority of rebates are of the mail-in variety, and they typically require consumers to send specified documentation to a redemption address. Some retailers allow consumers to file for rebates online; you should check the company's Web site to see if this option is available to you.

The documentation required for a rebate usually includes the original sales receipt, UPC code (which sometimes must be cut from the product package), rebate certificate, and the customer's name, address, telephone number, and/or e-mail address.

By law, companies are required to send rebates within the time frame promised. If the offer specifies no time frame, companies must send rebates within a reasonable time. "Reasonable" in this case often is interpreted as within 30 days.

When weighing a rebate offer in your purchasing decision, you should first note the expiration date on the offer to determine if you will have time to complete the rebate submission. You also should consider whether any special mailing instructions or the cost of sending the required documents outweighs the value of the rebate.

If you decide to make a purchase with a mail-in rebate offer, the following tips will help ensure you receive your rebate as promised:

1. Keep your receipt. Many manufacturers require you to send them the original or a copy of the receipt.
2. Retain packaging until you're certain you have all the required proofs of purchase. These could include UPC symbols, a special logo, or even a box top.
3. Read all of the directions on the rebate form and enclose all of the required documentation before mailing in your rebate request. If you have any questions, check the company's Web site or see if they have a phone number set up for rebate inquiries.
4. Make and keep copies of all your documents before you mail them. Print the mailing address clearly and correctly. Consider sending your rebate materials via certified mail.
5. Make note on your calendar of when you expect to receive your rebate. When it arrives, be sure to cash or deposit it before any expiration period noted on the check.
6. If your rebate doesn't arrive, follow up with the company or call the Illinois Attorney General's Office at 1-800-386-5438 (TTY: 1-800-964-3013) or 1-800-243-0618 (TTY: 1-877-844-5461).