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# Caught out by ad, web scams

## SMALL BUSINESS

Claire Heaney

SMALL and medium businesses are being swindled out of almost \$30 million a year in advertising scams.

The businesses are being sold bogus ad packages for publications and websites that do not exist, according to the Circulations Audit Board.

Based on complaints, the CAB estimates that businesses were stung by as many as 150 fake pitches in just a year.

In typical scams they are sold job and online ads that never appear and advertising space in magazines that do not exist. Businesses also paid bogus invoices that ap-

peared to be linked to genuine publications.

CAB chief executive Paul Dovas said businesses needed to check out the bona fides of any ad pitch before handing over their money.

"If the publication, website or event isn't audited, there is a serious risk that it isn't real and you could be wasting your marketing budgets," Mr Dovas said.

NSW Fair Trading assistant commissioner Don Jones will address next week's Accountability in Ad Spend conference in Sydney, which is being hosted by CAB.

Mr Jones, who is responsible for compliance and

enforcement, said the pitches seemed genuine.

"The scam figures we have are very conservative, given that many businesses aren't even aware they've been scammed and many others prefer not to acknowledge it," he said.

The growth in online media was also an area being exploited by crooks.

"Increasingly, the cases reported are linked with fraudulent websites and email trails that seem genuine. Even the savviest business operators are being tricked," Mr Jones said.



**Scam:** Businesses beware.