

## HSV- Beware Brushing Scheme

### Description

By [Cheryl Dowden](#), March 27, 2020

No, I am not referring to brushing your teeth or your hair. There is an online shopping scheme called “brushing,” which is used by unscrupulous internet sellers. HSV, please beware.

### Local stores offer free pick-up service

Due to COVID-19, many of us have changed the way we are doing our shopping. Some Villagers are ordering online through Walmart’s and Brookshire’s websites and picking up the order at the store. You pick a day and time and a store employee brings your order to your vehicle. You don’t even need to go inside. How nice!

### More online sales due to COVID-19

Villagers are also ordering supplies through other companies online such as [Chewys](#) for pet supplies and Amazon. Amazon carries just about anything you might want or need. These supplies are delivered right to your mailbox or front door.

Because of the increase in online orders, online brushing schemes may also be on the rise. A lot of the brushing packages come from China (and no, I am not picking on China.)

### Unsolicited package received from China

A fellow Villager, who chooses to remain anonymous received an unusual package in the mail. This is the email I received regarding this incident:

“Friends,

**"I just wanted to pass on an incident that happened to \*\*\*\* today. She received a small package sent from China. *That was curious in itself.***

**"It said the contents was a charger, but when she shook the package it sounded like loose pills inside. She had not ordered a charger.**

**"Since her birthday is coming up she checked with her children. They did not order anything for her either.**

**"She wiped the package with sanitizer and took it to the police. They took down the information on the package and advised her to bring it to the post office. The postal clerk said there were a lot of strange things going on lately but didn't elaborate. They are going to return the package. The package was not opened and it is curious what it contained.**

**"Sending this to you to be aware of receiving anything you didn't order and check where it came from.**

**"What happened to \*\*\*\* does not sound like an innocent thing since the addresser was in China.**

**"You're welcome to pass this on to others."**

**\*\*\***

This situation was likely a "brushing" scheme.

### **What is a brushing scheme?**

A brushing scheme is a tactic used by foreign retailers where inexpensive and unordered merchandise is sent to unsuspecting individuals. This is done so the seller can use the fake "sale" to write a positive review of their product on Amazon and other marketplace websites.

These fake positive reviews push the sellers' ratings up. The higher ratings result in the seller receiving more legitimate sales from unsuspecting consumers who think the reviews and ratings are real.

The brushing scheme also makes the seller appear to have more sales. This can elevate the seller in the marketplace ranks.

Often the unsolicited product contained in the box is not the product that receives the positive review but is something substantially less expensive such as hair ties. Sometimes the unsolicited boxes even contain no product.

### **How does brushing occur?**

A seller acquires a legitimate name and address of an unsuspecting individual and creates a fake account on the marketplace platform. A fake order for a product is placed by the seller. A light-weight package is shipped. After confirmation of delivery, the seller gives themselves a glowing five-star

review.

## Hidden dangers of brushing schemes

However, some have warned that there may be hidden dangers lurking within brushing schemes. As [MarketWatch reported](#):

“... being a victim of a “brushing” scam could also indicate something more nefarious. “It can be indicative of some kind of breach of confidentiality or data security,” Kilcourse said. “It’s a low-grade scam, with some pretty potentially serious data privacy considerations.””

How the brushing sellers receive personal data is not always clear.

How can non-domestic sellers afford to pay the international shipping rates when they have not actually sold the product?

## USPS offers non-domestic retailers special postal rates

The United States Postal Service has a special [subsidized shipping option for Chinese retailers](#). This allows them to ship a package from China to the United States for a very cheap postage rate. The cost for this international shipping is much less than if we were to mail a package in the United States from one state to another. This subsidized postal rate makes it cheap for the brusher to scam.

## Who pays the subsidy for this discount shipping?

In a couple of words- **WE DO**. U.S. taxpayers are subsidizing the shipping of foreign merchandise through higher postal costs for Americans or larger government loans to the USPS, when the Postal Service [doesn’t break even](#).

The foreign sellers can then undercut the American sellers on sites such as Amazon.

This hurts the American economy in two ways. First, it hurts the taxpayers in the form of higher taxes. Secondly, it makes it more difficult for American online sellers to compete.

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## [United Nations’ Universal Postal Union sets rates](#)

The artificially low international postal rates are set by the United Nations’ Universal Postal Union. These rates favor developing nations and also China. The problem here is that China has the world’s second-largest economy.

## New treaty goes into effect in July 2020

A new treaty “was announced on September 25, 2019. It will allow changes to US terminal fees starting in July 2020. At that time, the US will have the freedom to increase the terminal fees it charges

for inbound parcels from China and other countries. This could cause countries like China to raise mailing costs to cover the higher fees.”

Hopefully, the rate changes will slow down or eliminate the brushing scheme.

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### Date Created

03/27/2020

### Author

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