

When Free isn't Free

It may well be the most powerful word in advertising. Everyone loves the idea of getting something for nothing and so, many companies use 'freeness' to attract customers. So we get offers of free gifts or prizes, 'buy one, get one free' deals, or even interest-free finance deals to encourage us to buy.

However, we must be on the alert for instances of when 'free' isn't really free. The Consumer Protection Act protects consumers against false free offers.

Section 14 deals directly with free offers, forbidding companies from offering a 'gift, prize or other free item' when they do not really intend on 'providing [it] as offered.'

Goods cannot be considered free if:

- The price of the goods or services the customer must buy in order to qualify for the free item has been increased to cover the cost or part of the cost of the free item.
- The goods or services that the customer must buy can be purchased cheaper without the free item.

Remember, free should always mean free.