

# Sweepstakes Addicts Win Big!

**'Sweepers' Treat Entering Contests Like A Job And Have The Rewards To Show For It**

By **RON CLAIBORNE** and **MICHAEL MILBERGER**

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Among the 55 million Americans who enter sweepstakes contests every year, there's a small group of addicts known as 'sweepers,' who spend hours everyday submitting their forms and trying their luck.

They are addicted to the chance of winning, and win they do -- everything from toasters to an all-expenses-paid vacation to Tierra del Fuego.

The saying goes. "You've got to be in it to win it," and the sweepers logically argue the more often you enter, the better your odds.

Patti Osterheld is one such winner. "A trip to London, a trip to Zurich, a trip to Austria, a trip to Italy, a washer and dryer, TVs in every size and shape, including my latest, a 60-inch TV, a sound system to go with the television, a freezer, a year's supply of gas, a year's supply of milk, a year's supply of Starbucks coffee," Osterheld said, rattling off a list of her winnings.

Osterheld focuses on winning vacations. She wins four or five a year, and once won three in one day.

Kevin Rader of Covina, California, a fellow sweepstakes enthusiast, prefers cars. "I recently won my 14th car, which was Volkswagen Beetle, and it came with gasoline for a year," he said.

Sweepers like Rader and Osterheld say their secret is simple: a little bit of luck, a lot of patience and persistence, persistence, persistence.

"For me the best time of day to enter sweepstakes is when the house is settled for the night & I go to the computer, I set up folders for sweepstakes that I enter every single day," said Osterheld. The mother of three spends as much as twenty hours a week entering sweepstakes.

"Sweepstakeing has brought a really interesting dimension to my family life & we almost live by the philosophy of 'let's just wait until we win it' if there's a trip that we want, if there's a place we want to go, let's wait till we win it, and we usually do," she explained.

## **What You Should Know**

Never send money or make a purchase in an attempt to win a sweepstakes. Sweepstakes do not require a purchase to win and will not ask you for any financial information. Any suggestion that you should buy before entering could be illegal. Only give out basic contact information.

Publishers Clearinghouse, famous for their surprise door-knocking prize patrol, paid \$18 million in damages in 2000 for deceptive marketing techniques. Other companies have settled similar lawsuits and now provide clearer guidelines and list the odds of winning.

Despite the odds, sweepstakes are big business. Companies spent nearly \$2 billion last year on contests and sweepstakes promotions, trying to make their brand stand out.

"They want the consumers to feel that their brand is fun and interacting with their brand is fun and that the prizes are contemporary," said Bonnie Carlson, President of the Promotion Marketing Association.

**[For more tips from the Federal Trade Commission on how to spot a scam, click here.](#)**

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