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2012 Edition

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# The Mobility Buyers Protection Guide



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Produced by Osteopoise Healthcare Ltd.

# Why produce the guide?

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*Why have we seen the need to produce a guide warning potential customers about sharp practices and hugely fluctuating prices in what is supposed to be a “caring” industry, with the aim of helping people regain their independence?*

*The marketplace for mobility products has changed beyond all recognition over the past few years. There are some very good companies to deal with... but there are some rogue companies too. Some of the people selling products may not be as interested in providing the levels of service that we feel are so very important.*

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## How would you normally buy a product you are expecting to use for years to come?



If you are looking to buy a product that has moving parts, needs a proper warranty to protect it and may cost you a considerable amount, you are normally unlikely to choose a company that you don't know too much about. You want to be sure that they are genuine and that they are going to be around for some time to come.

So why don't people sometimes take the care when they are looking for help with mobility problems? Well, it could be that people spend less time researching the marketplace when it comes to products like scooters, powerchairs, bathlifts or adjustable beds.

Ask someone where they would buy a washing machine, television or car and they will be able to reel off a number of companies to go to, but when you are buying a mobility product for the first time it can be harder to find suppliers and people sometimes have little idea of where they can go for a fair deal.

And that's the problem.

Making a quick decision by buying something that looks like a good deal can lead to difficulties in the future. There are a number of things to look out for if you want to ensure that you really are getting a good deal in the long term and not just when you hand over your cash.

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***This guide, we hope, will help you to identify ways in which you can protect yourself.***

## **So, what's happening?**

“You may find people who have little regard for any kind of after sales service” On the one hand there are recognized mobility product suppliers, like us. We have invested in showroom premises, qualified staff, service facilities and everything that you would expect from a company geared up to provide customers with peace of mind.

On the other hand, you may find people who have little regard for any kind of after sales service and who may only be interested in taking your money and not in selecting the right product for your needs.

It means that you will see products in specialist showrooms like our own, on market stalls, advertised in local free papers and on the internet. In short, there's a confusing array of products on sale and you will find an incredibly wide range of pricing too.

Literally thousand's of pounds difference...

***“Although you think you are getting a bargain, you could be paying far more than you need”***

Yes, there really can be thousands of pounds difference between one supplier and another. Take a standard four – wheeled scooter for example. You could pay just over £1000 or you could pay up to £4000. How can this be so?

Here's why...

An amazing deal on scooters, beds or bathlifts! Save £400! 20% off! Headlines you might have seen screaming out at you from advertisements in the national press. Fantastic deals surely – But are they really?

The fact is, that although the discounts are certainly real, the prices of the products in question may be substantially more than you might expect to pay for a similar product bought from a showroom based company. In the end, although you think you are getting a bargain, you could be paying far more than you need.



## How “Direct Selling” can increase the price you pay...

You see, showroom based companies don’t usually have the high costs associated with “direct selling.”



“Direct Selling” is a method of selling products direct to the customer with enquiries usually generated through either national newspaper advertising or direct mail, a little like double glazing. Then a sales person will call and they will generally earn commission (sometimes very large commissions) from your purchase.

The expensive advertising and the sales person has to be paid for somehow – that’s why the prices can sometimes be that much higher

### **Are you paying for the salesman’s commission?**

Buying from a salesman who may rely entirely on commission from sales brings its own problems too. Many people who send for information after seeing a national newspaper advert the very first time are just starting to think about buying a mobility product.

However, sometimes you may not be given the time to consider the best option.

Most companies will contact you after you have made an enquiry but if they are pushy, or just wish to call in as “ they are in the area”, **beware.**

Do not agree to a demonstration until you are absolutely ready. When you are, consider having a friend or relative present to help you ask the right questions.



### **“Win a free scooter”**

You may have seen the “win a scooter” competitions in the press. Be aware that, if you enter one, you may well be contacted by a direct selling company that will treat you as a potential customer. These competitions are one of the main ways in which direct selling companies generate their enquiries.

#### ***You can be more confident if there’s a showroom to visit***

Established, showroom based companies will often have staff with years of experience and be able to demonstrate a wide range of products. That’s important, as you will generally only

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get to see one type of product when you send for details from a national newspaper advertisement.

***Seeing different models will give you a much better idea of what's right for your particular needs.***

Freephone numbers may save you the cost of a phone call, but, you might be phoning a company hundreds of miles away. So, check where the company base is. If it's hundreds of miles away from your home, consider what will happen if your product goes wrong (which is possible). We have a freephone and a local number.

If the company doesn't help you out as quickly as you would like you certainly will not be able to take the product back yourself. Remember, whatever product you buy, it will need servicing or repairing at some time in its life.

Make certain that whoever supplies the products can service it with their own accredited service engineers and that they hold plenty of spare parts for the product.

Finally, a good supplier will always be willing to demonstrate products even if the enquiry is for the future. They will be happy to carry out more than one demonstration.

**National "Direct Selling" companies may be less obliging due to the distance they have to travel**



**The more pressure, the more likely you are to make a mistake...**

Some of the salespeople who call may even have had to buy your details from the company they are working with and

so they will want to make the most of every single contact. Because of this you may find that you are placed under more pressure to make a decision straight away – even if you are not completely sure about your choice.

Coming back on a second visit may be viewed as an unnecessary additional cost by such a salesperson. That's why they will be so keen for you to make the decision quickly and making a quick decision generally means that you don't have all the facts at hand.

"Unique" models could be signal for concern

Watch out for "unique" models too. Sometimes companies call their scooter, powerchair, bed, riser chair or bathlift a different name – even though it is almost exactly the same product as a popular leading brand. This may confuse and make price comparisons difficult. On a few occasions the product is slightly different, with, for example, a slightly different seat or even just

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a different colour trim. On many occasions though, there may be absolutely no difference to a model that may be selling for hundreds of pounds less – only the name is different!

So, if a company tells you that they have their own brand product, find out more and don't commit yourself until you have checked it out further.

Osteopose Healthcare do have our own brand Riser Recliner chairs with genuine feature differences which were developed to meet the more exacting needs of our NHS clients. With a 5 year warranty, and pricing well below other leading brands.

***But what if you have been quoted a price that is a good deal lower than our own?***

“The low price may be attractive, but what happens if and when you need support in the future?”

well, it can happen. Our policy is that we charge fair prices for the product and the service that we provide. As we have said, we have a proper showroom, qualified staff, have invested in training and spare parts and that means that we have certain costs to cover.

The question is, do you really want to buy a product from someone who might have no real knowledge or experience of the products and who might even be running the business “on the side.”

The low price may be attractive, but what happens if and when you need the support in the future?

Here are just some of the things that we are hearing from customers who have bought a heavily discounted product and then regretted it afterwards...

*“I have just been told that the company is no longer trading and I have to find someone to come out and mend the product”*

*“The company have told me that they cannot service the machine as they cannot get the spare parts and have advised me to contact you”*

*“They are saying that the man who sold me the product doesn't work for them anymore and that he was responsible for the warranty on the machine”*

*“No one answers the telephone. I cannot get through to them”*

*“They are asking for a huge amount, just to come and take a look at what is wrong”*

*“They are saying that they cannot get anyone out to see me for a week or so as they have no one working in the area”*

*And the list goes on.....*

# You get what you pay for!



*"It's unwise to pay too much, but it's worse to pay too little.*

*When you pay too much, you lose a little money – that is all.*

*When you pay too little, you sometimes lose everything, because the thing you bought was incapable of doing the job it was bought to do.*

*The common law of business balance prohibits paying a little and getting a lot- it can't be done.*

*If you deal with the lowest bidder, it is as well to add something for the risk you run, and if you do that, you will have enough to pay for something better"*

*John Ruskin (1819 – 1900)*

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As we have said, we price our products and service reasonably and fairly, at a level where we can support you and the product long into the future, not just for the next week or so.

Buying cheaply can be great if you know exactly what you are getting.

Buying cheaply when you are expecting ongoing service might not be so clever.

If people ask us to cut costs we generally ask them – “which part of our service don’t you want to have?”

***But I can always get the product mended locally if I have a problem can’t I?***

Maybe you can. However, some established based showroom companies have now decided that they will not repair a product that has been sold by another company. They feel that they are being “used” by companies that sell cheaply but don’t have any interest in the customer after the product has been delivered.

If you are thinking about buying a product either off the internet or from a company that isn’t based in your area and the price looks very low, it might be worth calling us to check whether we would be able to repair or service the product if the worst comes to the worst.

## Scooters

It is important to have the option of seeing more than one manufacturer’s model.

Try to visit a showroom such as ours to see the range not just one or two on the back of a van.

Watch the mileage ranges you are quoted. They may not be achievable in practice.

Be realistic about your expectations, a boot scooter is not usually suitable for use as an everyday general product.

Ask about insurance, Breakdown facilities and the availability of a loan model if your needs any repairs at any time now or in the future.



Check that the product is not a “grey import”. We have seen instances of unbranded “copycat” models that have been imported, usually from the far east as a job lot with no spares or backup facilities.



## Powerchairs

More care needs to be taken in selecting a power-chair than a scooter as you will probably spend more time in it. Make sure your supplier understands your physical needs. and has a grasp of how things may develop over time. Budget chairs at the lower end of the price scale are usually limited in terms of adaptation or suitability for someone with a more complex or degenerative condition that will probably require adjustment or adaptation to meet those needs over time. Time and life is important you need to deal with a company who will be honest with you about the level of service and support they can offer.



## Riser Armchairs

Riser Recliner chairs have become more sophisticated and no two chairs are exactly the same. There is a bewildering variety of options and not just the fabric coverings to consider. there are different mechanisms that behave very differently, there are options of different arm styles, important for helping you to stand, plus there are options for accommodating different body shapes,sizes as well as posture and pressure care for long term sitters with more complex needs. It is fair to say that sitting and posture-care and its associated problems is one of the most common healthcare issues we deal with.

Budget chairs are usually built to a much lower standard,have a limited fabric range and limited or no facilities to alter the style or size of the chair. However they are usually available within 48-72hrs of purchase or possible sooner in some cases.

## Adjustable Beds

One of the most common features oversold by Direct Sales companies is Heat & Massage systems in beds, usually to bolster dubious claims about the health benefits of these beds.



There are some very good and well documented benefits of adjustable beds as well as the more supportive and comfortable mattress's available. Other options available include side rails, hoist access and height adjustable beds and pressure relieving mattress's.

## Bathlifts

It has been known for bath lifts to be advertised in the national press as a sale item which was hundreds of pounds more than you could pay in a showroom for exactly the same model, so be careful.



**WARNING:** not all lifts fit all baths! Ask for a free no obligation home visit to try it in the bath before you make a decision.

## Manual Wheelchairs

Again, it's best to get to see a range of models, there are models and designs for almost every type of customer. There is no one size fits all when it comes to Wheelchairs. There is a vast difference between an occasional use (something to pop to the shops in occasionally) and a full time everyday use chair and beyond that in terms of comfort, posture-care & pressure-care and knowing the limitations and advantages of each design. Its essential to get expert advice



***Theres more to wheelchairs that you might think***

## Stairlifts

The price quoted should include installation and assessments should be free. There is a lot of potential for error and a badly fitted or ill considered lift can be costly. Stairlifts give a great deal of independence, the ability to continue living in and using all of your home.

Maintenance and response to breakdown should be high on the list of considerations. Stairlifts, due to how and when people are most likely to use them need a round the clock service and backup facility.

***“If you request details from an advert in the national press, you may see a salesperson at your door within a few days, whether you have requested a visit or not.”***

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And Finally...

Deposits - Most suppliers will ask for a deposit when taking an order. This will normally be in the region of 50% but may be higher if the product is unusual or requires special modifications. Any modifications should be documented and be part of the order.

Second Hand – Do not be tempted to base your purchase solely on the money you have available. Contact a dealer and explain the situation. A good dealer will be happy to advise you even if you intend to buy privately.

Many people buy obsolete or defective machines so don't get caught out.

We do not resell (new or used) items that we have little or no prospect of being able to support. As a guide we don't resell items over 5 years old.

If they wont give you a price...

If a company refuses to quote you a price for a product, then you should simply refuse to have anything else to do with them. And, be careful if they do quote you a price eventually too. You may find that the price you have been quoted is for the smallest, cheapest product they have, rather than the model that you are actually interested in.

Some companies will have very small or very cheap models in the range that they never intend the customer to buy, but by having them available it gives them the opportunity to quote the lowest price possible when the customer asks.

Our Promise to you

- We will always give you a price indication of a product over the telephone. We have nothing to hide and we would never dream of ripping our customers off or making a profit that would be considered by many to be obscene.
- We will never artificially inflate prices just so that we can discount them in order that you think that you are getting a great deal when, in fact, you may be paying far more than you need. We charge a fair and realistic price every single time.

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- We will only ever visit your home when you invite us. We won't turn up on your doorstep and pressure you in to buying a product that might not be right for you but that we need to get rid of.
  - We will only supply you the product that we believe to be absolutely right for your needs, not simply the one that we will earn the most money from. We have years of experience and we know the products inside out.
  - We don't employ commission only sales people. No one who works for our company is totally reliant on the sales that they make to survive. They aren't under pressure to close sales and they are trained to properly understand the products in the showroom.
  - We have a showroom that you can visit whenever you wish.
  - We won't let you down. If you buy one product from us, you will feel comfortable buying a second in the future.

*Our number one warning!*

*Remember, if a company won't give you an indication of a price on the telephone, it means that they have something to hide and you almost certainly will be able to buy the product cheaper!*

## Credits

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