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GMAT Cheating: Risks Outweigh Rewards

By Lawrence M. Rudner

As the admission testing season swings into high gear, the first place many students will turn to is the internet, where they will find that an entire industry has evolved to offer test preparation services. These sites offer information about specific tests, advice on how to prepare, discussions of testing experiences, presentations of success stories, access to practice questions, and more. Most of this information is available free, and most of these sites are legitimate.

For a fee, however, some sites offer subscriptions for access to “special” test questions. A typical testimonial might say, “I saw four of the special questions and did real well on the test.” Subscribers are encouraged to return after they take the exam to post questions that they saw.

Only a tiny fraction of test takers take the bait, and they foolishly—and permanently—jeopardize their reputations and careers. Accessing live test questions in advance, like having someone take the test for you, is cheating. Aside from considering the obvious moral reasons not to cheat, all test takers should understand the potential risks and rewards.

The immediate risks are having your score canceled and being banned from testing. If you are already in school, you could be thrown out. If you’re on a student visa, you may have to leave the country in disgrace. If you have graduated, your degree could be revoked. What’s more, any of these things could happen at any time.

GMAC and other major testing companies routinely cancel scores when they suspect there has been a testing irregularity. They recognize their obligation to the hundreds of thousands of honest examinees who take their tests each year, and so have the courts. Test publishers need only a good faith reason to question the validity of a test score to follow through with a cancellation or other action. The Graduate Management Admission Council, for one, identifies the reason for a score cancellation on score reports sent to schools.

If you can find a website offering “special questions,” so can the test sponsor. Chances are, the test sponsor is already monitoring that website. Testing companies work with the FBI, eBay, PayPal, the courts, and others to protect the quality of their tests.

GMAC has gotten numerous websites to voluntarily remove “special questions” and has persisted when website operators have refused. In the highest profile case so far, GMAC won a default judgment against the operator of Scoretop.com in 2008. When caught, the owner of that website fled the country. GMAC, in fairness to all of the honest GMAT test takers, was able to examine the tests taken by all the subscribers. Scores were canceled and schools notified.

While the risk is great, what are the potential benefits? In analyzing the Scoretop data, GMAC found that the actual rewards were slight, if non-existent, for most people. Many of the testimonials were fiction, written by the owner of the website. The collections of “special questions” included very few live questions. Realistically, on a computer adaptive test with a large question bank like the GMAT exam, the chance of actually seeing a posted question on test day is extremely low. The chances of seeing a given posted question that you would have gotten wrong is even lower.

The rewards offered by illegitimate companies on the Internet may seem attractive, but they are obviously overblown. Testing companies are committed to ensuring their exams provide a fair measure of every test taker’s abilities. The smart consumer will consider the source when reading testimonials touting an unfair advantage. The risks involved are very real, and quite permanent.

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