
MILITARY TIMES

Consumer Watch: Military verification brings more discounts



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New technology is helping active-duty troops, family members and veterans take advantage of more discounts.

The idea is to verify that customers are actually who they say they are so companies have some assurance that discounts aren't going to fraudsters posing as members of the military community.

Here are some examples of these efforts:

*Troop ID is essentially an "online ID card" for troops, veterans and spouses that allows members to get deals and discounts online. Eligible customers can tie their email to their military credentials by visiting TroopID.com. Once they are verified, customers can use the Troop ID widget on retailers' websites to get discount vouchers for a variety of national brands. In essence, it creates a digital identity credential.

More than 1,000 partners are companies offer discounts through Troop ID, ranging from Regal Entertainment Group's movie theaters to Overstock.com and Tough Mudder.

Under Armour was one of the first merchant partners of Troop ID. Because of this technology, the company was able to extend its 10 percent military discount, originally offered only in brick and mortar stores, to online stores.

*The company SheerID works in a different way. It doesn't create a digital identity credential like Troop ID, but provides technology for "point-of-sale" verification any retailer can use at the cash register or online checkout. Most of the effort is on the part of the retailer marketing their discount or offer, then verifying that their customer is eligible to get the discount. The technology allows merchants to customize discounts and savings for a variety of groups, such as teachers or the military, and verify their eligibility.

Retailer can ask for the customer's first and last name and date of birth, and the system will search to find out whether the customer qualifies for a military discount. SheerID uses proprietary technology that acts as a bridge between merchants and secure databases – such as the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System – while keeping the information safe and secure, according to Jake Weatherly, chief executive officer of SheerID.

More than 30 companies have signed on with SheerID to offer military and veteran discounts. Among them is Costco, which offers \$50 in savings to new members who are active duty, veterans or family members. Other national brands involved in the program include PGA Tour, Fathead and Nosler. An additional 100 companies have contacted SheerID expressing interest in offering a protected military discount, Weatherly said.

Military personnel have saved more than \$2 million since last January by using SheerID-protected offers, Weatherly said.