

Internet Dating Scams
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The internet has made the task of the confidence artist easier and his reach global. We are warned almost daily about 'phishing' sites, and more recently 'pharming' sites, intended to trick the unwary out of the user name and password for a variety of accounts. These are more related to the simple smash and grab type thievery than to a true confidence game.

More insidious and potentially harmful are the scams that victimize women and men looking for Love on the internet.

We won't explore the logic or the difficulties involved in long distance relationships, or the compatibility issues left open when your only contact is via emails and webcams. We also won't explore the relative guilt of men on these sites looking for sex instead of love and whether they deserved it.

This article is about scams. One of the earliest and longest lasting long distance scams is the 'Nigerian' or 4-1-9 scam, named for the section of the Nigerian penal code covering fraud. Dating to the 1920's a letter/email claims to be from a foreign official or his relatives and offers a large sum to assist them in getting money out of the country.

The newer variation on this is the 'hard-luck scam' where a person claims to be an American or occasionally a British citizen working overseas. The cause of the hard luck varies of course but the result is the same. A request to wire money to them with the promise to repay after the person returns to the U.S. or Britain.

This variation is turning up frequently on dating sites where the con artist takes time to build a trusting relationship with the victim, normally women. A variation on this scam directed at men uses a damsel in distress theme. Stranded in (insert your choice of country) by a tragic accident that killed family or friends a beautiful young woman is trying to get home and needs help with a plane ticket or to pay for a visa or even bills she has accrued while stranded in country.

These type scams have been coming mostly from East Africa, mainly Nigeria and Ghana. Eastern Europe and Russia also have a share of the 419 and hard-luck scammers but they have developed several scams using relatively unique components and aimed almost exclusively at male victims.

The Correspondence Scam comes in two forms. The first is related to the hard luck scam. After developing an online relationship with the victim the lovely young woman suffers a hardship. Sometimes hours are cutback at work and she needs help with the phone bill or paying for internet access. Other times her computer crashes and she needs money for repairs, parts, or a whole new computer.

The alternative Correspondence Scam is closer to outright prostitution. After several introductory letters of increasing levels of personal details and sexuality she decides that her time is spent better elsewhere and if wishes to continue writing it will cost \$XX per month.

Related to the Correspondence Scam but with unique elements is the Translation Scam. Again targeting men, the website charges to translate the letters to and from beautiful Eastern European women who, while interested in western men and finding a western husband, do not speak, read, or write in English.

A more recent variation is the Affiliate Scam. Once again targeting male victims, the scammer posts a profile and either waits to be contacted or initiates contact. When the man replies she claims not to trust the initial site and instructs him to look her up on the second 'free' site. At the second site, the victim has to pay for a new account. If her account exists, she claims she didn't know and that women must be allowed to join for free.

This type of Affiliate Scam is sometimes the work of unscrupulous site operators stealing visitors from their competition and sometimes the work of allied sites using a bait and switch method of extracting funds.

Related to all of these are the scammers who join dating sites with stolen credit cards. These are almost self evident in the urgency they need the victim with. They will claim their membership is about to expire and they just noticed the new member and need him or her to write them at -insert your choice of free email- .com.

Along with the cash lost in all these cases comes the loss of trust in both people, and worse, in the Internet as a whole. Internet retailers have gained in sales volume every year since the inception of the medium. When trust in the reliability of the medium reaches equilibrium with the risks involved sales will begin to return to the clerk you can reach.