



# Public Service Announcement

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION



**April 29, 2011**

## **THE DANGEROUS SIDE OF ONLINE ROMANCE SCAMS**

The IC3 is warning the public to be wary of romance scams in which scammers target individuals who search for companionship or romance online. Someone you know may be "dating" someone online who may appear to be decent and honest. However, be forewarned: the online contact could be a criminal sitting in a cyber café with a well-rehearsed script that scammers have used repeatedly and successfully. Scammers search chat rooms, dating sites, and social networking sites looking for victims. The principal group of victims is over 40 years old and divorced, widowed, elderly, or disabled, but all demographics are at risk.

Scammers use poetry, flowers, and other gifts to reel in victims, the entire time declaring their "undying love." These criminals also use stories of severe life circumstances, tragedies, deaths in the family, injuries to themselves, or other hardships to keep their victims concerned and involved in their schemes. Scammers also ask victims to send money to help overcome a financial situation they claim to be experiencing. These are all lies intended to take money from unsuspecting victims.

In another scheme, scammers ask victims to receive funds in the form of a cashier's check, money order, or wire transfer, claiming they are out of the country and unable to cash the instruments or receive the funds directly. The scammers ask victims to redirect the funds to them or to an associate to whom they purportedly owe money. In a similar scheme, scammers ask victims to reship packages instead of redirecting funds. In these examples, victims risk losing money and may incur other expenses, such as bank fees and penalties, and in some instances face prosecution.

Victims who have agreed to meet in person with an online love interest have been reported missing, or injured, or in one instance, deceased. IC3 complainants most often report the countries of Nigeria, Ghana, England, and Canada as the location of the scammers. If you are planning to meet someone in person that you have met online, the IC3 recommends using caution, especially if you plan to travel to a foreign country, and, at the very least:

- Do not travel alone.
- Read all travel advisories associated with the countries you will visit. Travel advisories are available at <http://travel.state.gov/>.
- Contact the United States Embassy in the country you plan to visit.

Even though it seems to be contrary to the thought of starting a new romance, do not be afraid to check a new acquaintance's story online. Remember, like most fraudulent schemes, scammers use whatever personal information you provide to quickly paint themselves as your perfect match. If your new friend's story is repeated through numerous complaints and articles on the Internet, it is time to apply common sense over your feelings. To obtain more information on romance scams and other types of online schemes, visit [www.LooksTooGoodToBeTrue.com](http://www.LooksTooGoodToBeTrue.com). Anyone who believes they have been a victim of this type of scam should promptly report it to the IC3's website at [www.IC3.gov](http://www.IC3.gov).