

Tech Tuesday: Building a Digital Defense Against Romance Scams

February 8, 2022

A graphic with a dark blue background featuring a circuit board pattern. In the center is a large, faint, circular seal of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Overlaid on this is the text "TECH TUESDAY: Romance Scams" in white, bold, sans-serif font. Below this title is a bulleted list of four items in white text. At the bottom left is the FBI logo and the text "FBI FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION". At the bottom right is the text "Portland Field Office" in white, bold, sans-serif font.

TECH TUESDAY: Romance Scams

- Research new “love” online. Check info, photos & profiles for scam reports.
- Be wary if your virtual partner can never meet in person.
- Do not travel to meet someone, esp. if it means going to a foreign country.
- Report scams to www.ic3.gov.

 **FBI** FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Portland Field Office

Welcome to the Oregon FBI’s Tech Tuesday segment. Today: Building a digital defense against broken hearts.

One billion dollars. That’s the amount of money that the FBI’s Internet Crime Complaint Center estimates that romance fraud victims lost in 2021. And, those are just the victims who reported losing their heart – and bank account – to such scammers.

While anyone can be a victim of this fraud, the bad actors are known to target women over age 40 who are widowed, divorced, elderly, and/or disabled.

The victim just wants connection and companionship. The bad guy generally wants cold hard cash.

He may be direct about it and just ask for you to send him money for some big emergency. To avoid meeting in person, romance scammers often claim to live or work in other parts of the country or world. Eventually,

when they feel they have gained the trust of their victims, these criminals will ask for cash. He may say he needs money to move back home or to pay for some legal or medical emergency.

These bogus boyfriends and greedy girlfriends may want more than just money, too. They likely will try to trick victims into releasing personal info – such as birth dates and bank account numbers – that they can exploit for further scams or sell for more profit. Romance fraud victims also are very vulnerable to bad actors who want to use them to launder money.

Here are some warning signs:

- Your new love wants you to leave the dating app where you met to move to a more private messaging option, such as email or text.
- He wants you to send compromising photos or videos of yourself.
- His photo appears to be a glamour shot or her profile is too perfect.
- And, of course, there's always the ask for money or the ask to help move money.

Here are some things you can do to avoid the pitfalls of a bad online breakup:

- Research your new love. Use online search tools to see whether that photo, name, or profile links to other scams.
- Question any relationship where your virtual soulmate always has an excuse as to why he can't visit in person.
- Don't travel to meet someone, especially if it involves travel to a foreign country. Such visits can end in tragedy.
- Be careful about how much information you post online. A good scammer can turn a tiny bit of detail into a very effective romantic pitch.

Losing your heart – and your bank account – in romance scams can be both emotionally and financially devastating. We ask victims, though, to come forward so that we can identify those who are committing these crimes and protect others in the process.

If you are the victim of an online fraud, you should report the incident to the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center at www.ic3.gov or call your FBI local office.