

SCAMMERS FINDING NEW MARKETS

While the number of victims looks high, authorities believe the complaints received by the ACCC represent just the tip of the iceberg ...



ASK MOST MIDDLE-AGED AUSTRALIAN MEN IF THEY CONSIDER THEMSELVES PRETTY GOOD WITH MONEY AND CHANCES ARE MOST WILL GIVE A RESOUNDING 'YES'.

WHAT THEY PROBABLY won't tell you is they are also the group most likely to complain to authorities of being ripped off by scammers.

Examining complaints to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has brought to light some surprising insights into whom the fraudsters target and where they are doing the most harm.

In the lead-up to this year's Australasian Consumer Fraud Taskforce annual fraud fortnight campaign the ACCC looked at more than 10 000 reports of scams received by its Infocentre during 2007.

Observations suggest more people lost money to lottery-style scams than any other mass market fraud, although advance fee (also known as Nigerian) scams ran a close second.

While slightly more men than women reported being snared by fraud, victims of all ages were recorded, with those aged between 35 and 44 being the most likely group to report losing money.

Other big-hit scams that resulted in victims losing significant sums were investment and real estate frauds as well as computer prediction and betting software rip-offs.

While the number of victims looks high, authorities believe the complaints received by the ACCC represent just the tip of the iceberg because they do not include complaints to other authorities like the police. The majority of mass market global fraud is also thought to go unreported.

Because of the difficulty of obtaining accurate information, drawing conclusions about losses can be problematic. However, advanced fee fraud is estimated to cost Australians more than a billion dollars every year.

Based on what authorities do know, such as information gleaned from the records of taskforce members and other organisations that fight consumer fraud, the fraud fortnight campaign has identified two main tricks used by scammers to snare their victims.

First, they use seduction. This might be in the form of promising an unexpected financial windfall like a lottery win, inheritance or easy money job offer. While there are many variations on these scams, they all work by seducing victims with the promise of a better life, whether through love, money or status.

Second, they use deception to con victims into handing over personal financial information which is then used to siphon off their money.

This type of deception includes fraudsters pretending to be bank officials wanting to confirm account details and fake phishing websites designed to harvest sensitive information from unsuspecting users.

Regardless of the method used, these techniques are all designed to get at your money or identity.

This year fraud fortnight ran from 24 February to 8 March. During the campaign 18 government and 80 private and community partners provided tips on some of the latest scams and how to avoid them. The latest information on scams is available on the ACCC website, www.scamwatch.gov.au.

To report scams to the ACCC and seek advice about them, use the SCAMwatch website; the dedicated SCAMwatch hotline, 1300 795 995; or the TTY service for speech and hearing impaired, 1300 303 609.

Callers who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment can contact the ACCC through the National Relay Service at www.relayservice.com.au. TTY or modem users should phone 133 677 and ask for 1300 302 502; voice-only (speak and listen) users should phone 1300 555 727 and ask for 1300 302 502. ●



SAFETY ALERT ON PRAMS

ALL PRAMS AND STROLLERS SOLD IN AUSTRALIA WILL NOW HAVE TO COMPLY WITH NEW SAFETY STANDARDS THAT CAME INTO FORCE ON JULY 1.

THE INTRODUCTION of the mandatory standard, designed to reduce the risk of injuries to children, comes after the deaths of two children in separate incidents in Adelaide in 2006 and 2007. Both children died when their prams rolled away from carers and into the Torrens. Several other roll-away incidents have also been recorded, highlighting the dangers of unrestrained strollers.

The new standard requires all prams and strollers to have at least one parking brake, the actuator of which must also be red as a strong visual reminder for parents and carers to use the brake whenever the pram or stroller is not moving.

A tether strap, which is an additional mandatory safety feature, must also be

provided with all prams and strollers. The strap must carry a warning to use the strap to stop the pram or stroller from rolling away.

Restraint harnesses are required for all strollers and must, as a minimum, include waist and crotch straps; they must also include a warning to use the harness at all times.

The ACCC has recently released a free DVD for parents about issues to consider when buying and using children's nursery and other equipment, including prams and strollers. *Keeping Baby Safe* is available for free as a DVD or brochure or as downloaded document from the ACCC website, www.accc.gov.au. ●

The ACCC has recently released a free DVD for parents about issues to consider when buying and using children's nursery and other equipment ...