

# Social Networking and Online Dating Fraud

Social networking is the practice of expanding the number of business or social contacts a person has by making connections with individuals. The potential of the Internet to promote these connections is now being fully recognized and exploited, through Web-based groups established for that purpose. Social Networking establishes Internet communities also known as personal networks that help people make contacts that they would be unlikely to have met otherwise.

How it works:

1. You join one of the sites and invite people you know to join you as well.
2. Those people invite their contacts to join, who in turn invite their contacts to join, and the process repeats for each person.
3. Any individual can make contact through anyone they have a connection to, and then to any of the people that person has a connection to, and so on.

Online dating or Internet dating allows individuals, couples, and groups to make contact and communicate with each other over the internet usually with the objective of developing a relationship. Online dating services usually provide un-moderated matchmaking over the internet, through the user of personal computers or cell phones.

Online dating services generally require a prospective member to provide personal information, before they can search the service provider's database for other individuals using criteria they set, such as age range, gender and location. Most sites allow member to upload photos of themselves, and browse the photos of others. Sites may offer additional services, such as webcasts, online chat, telephone chat (VOIP), and message boards. Some sites provide free registrations, but may offer services which require a monthly fee.

Many sites are broad-based, with members coming from a variety of backgrounds looking for different types of relationships. Other sites are more specific, based on the type of members, interests, location, or relationship desired.

## Dangers on Social Networking and Online Dating Sites:

- Giving out too much personal information:
  - Name
  - Age/Birthdates
  - Address/Phone Numbers/Email Addresses
  - Pictures
  - School/Workplace
  - Hobbies/Interests
  - Information about friends
- Results of too much information:
  - Identity Theft
  - Cyber Luring
  - Stalking/Criminal Harassment
  - Fraud
  - Passwords being compromised

It is extremely important to remember that once you put personal information about yourself on the Internet – your name, birthdate, address, pictures – you could lose control of that information.

There has been a significant increase of the number of complaints that are being received by police regarding fraud taking place on these types of websites. The victims end up sending thousands of dollars to persons they make contact with on these websites, with the money being sent out of Canada, and not being recoverable. In these types of frauds, the majority of the time the first contact is made by the perpetrator. Often the perpetrator will say they are a successful business person who is originally located in Canada or the United States, but they are out of the country either on business or doing some type of humanitarian work. Once the initial contact is made they will work aggressively to develop and groom the relationship, telling the victim almost immediately about their love and devotion towards them, and upon their return they will be together for the rest of their lives. Once the perpetrator has determined that the victim has reciprocated in their affection, they will begin asking for money to be sent to them through a Money Transfer service. The people committing these crimes are con-artists and appeal to the victims desire to have contact with someone. The following are some of the reasons that the perpetrator may provide to the victim why they need money sent to them:

- Money is needed for airline tickets to see the victim. The perpetrator will go as far as to provide the victim with a flight itinerary to indicate they will be coming to see the victim.
- The money is needed to access other money. Once the perpetrator received the victims' money, and accesses the money, they promise they will return the victims money, plus extra for their troubles.
- The perpetrator has been victim of bad luck, and needs the money to get back on their feet, ie. robbery, motor vehicle accidents, or assaults which have resulted in hospital bills that has to be paid.
- The money is necessary to either have their children transported to their location, or returned to where they indicate is their home.
- The money is necessary to promote the supposed humanitarian reasons they are in that location (orphanages, missionary work, reconstruction).
- They have lost their wallet and all identification including their passport and have no ability to access their own money.
- They have to pay money for various reasons to government agencies in the country they are located. They will go as far to send false government documents to the victim to make this appear legitimate.

The perpetrator is often very pushy and aggressive when asking for money and does not give the victim the chance to think about the request or talk to anyone about it. If the victim questions the perpetrator about why they need the money or state it will create financial difficulty for them to send the money, the perpetrator will become confrontational and accuse the victim of not caring or loving them, not being willing to help them, and trying to break up the relationship. The perpetrator will state that they are the one who is trying to develop the relationship, and the victim won't help them. The perpetrator will state they were counting on the money and state the victim had promised to send them the money, and eventually guilt the victim into sending the money.

The following are tips that people can use to ensure they are not victim of fraud:

- Pay attention to the content of the email and look for details such as:
  - Poor spelling, broken sentences, improper capitalization of words, broken english.
  - Many biblical references made in the content of the email.

- The sender has a generic name or a name that has biblical references.
- Almost immediately the sender states their love and devotion, and how they are looking forward to being together for the rest of their lives.
- The name the sender is using does not match the name on the email address.
- The sender changes their name, or gives some type of excuse why they were using a prior name.
- The content of the email changes such as the reason why they need money changes, or it appears the email is being written by a different person than before.
- The sender refers to the victim by an incorrect name.
- The sender over emphasizes how much they trust the victim.
- They want the money sent via a money transfer service because it can be picked up in any location in the country where it is being sent to. The money can be obtained minutes after being sent. The person picking up the money receives it with false identification, at a location where there isn't surveillance video.
- The perpetrator will send the victim a picture that appears too perfect, the people look like models, and the pictures appear to be from a magazine or catalogue. The pictures may not match the details the person has provided about themselves such as nationality, age, hair color, eye color, height and weight. Remember people can easily obtain pictures of people from the internet and use them.
- Use the internet as a tool to protect yourself. Do websearches on the name of the person contacting you, and their contact information such as email addresses and phone numbers. There may already be information on the internet about these perpetrators from people who have already been victim to them.
- Do not provide personal information about yourself such as your address and phone number, occupation, and other details of your personal life.

Remember that everyone you meet online is a stranger until you can prove otherwise, therefore under no circumstances do you send money to someone you meet online.

If you are victim to a fraud through Social Networking or Online Dating websites, ensure you save all details of the incident such as emails, transactions, and details of the suspect and contact your local police service or the RCMP.