

Online dating fraud on the rise

Action Fraud, the UK's first national fraud reporting centre, has had 15,000 web reports and calls in the last six months from members of the public. According to a press release issued by the National Fraud Authority, which runs Action Fraud, at least £3.5 billion is lost by individuals to fraud every year. However, the actual figure is probably much higher as many victims of fraud never report it.

Romance and dating fraud made up the third largest category of reported fraud, exceeded only by online shopping and auctions and advance fee fraud.

Action Fraud quotes the case of Brenda Parke, a victim of a romance scam who lost £60,000 earlier this year:

"With great hindsight, I can see how I became a victim. My embarrassment is overwhelming but I know it's important to take this step in reporting my experience to help other people avoid such devastating situations. Anyone in a similar situation should stop and think before they hand over a single penny and I would urge anyone who is a victim to come forward and report this horrendous crime to Action Fraud. The perpetrators manipulate you to pay a huge price financially and emotionally and I want to see fewer people becoming victims."

Such fraud is often perpetrated by organised crime gangs, usually operating outside the UK and therefore very hard for law enforcement agencies to touch.

Action Fraud cites some simple rules everyone can follow to protect themselves against fraud:

- If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is
- Ask questions - If someone is legitimate they won't pressurise you or be elusive
- Be very wary about giving your personal information to strangers or providing money up front

Whilst Action Fraud's example is fraud against a woman, such frauds are more usually targeted against men, who are generally more at risk.

Dating Agency and Singles Events service RSVP offers a safe way to go dating; it protects its clients from fraud by interviewing and ID-checking all potential members up front. So they know who their clients are and where they live. In the unlikely event that anything did go wrong (and it hasn't yet), it would be a relatively simple matter to trace anyone involved or suspected.

RSVP have also assembled their own advice on avoiding internet dating scams and published this on the website: www.dating-tips-and-advice.co.uk.

For more details about membership, visit www.rsvp-uk.com or call 0800 542 7262.

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Notes to Editors

RSVP was established in 1992 and is today one of the UK's largest and most-respected off-line dating agencies. Owned today by husband and wife team Anne and Roland Stringer, RSVP is distinguished by being one of the very few agencies to offer two ways for single people to meet:

- one-to-one introductions
- 60 singles events every month.

RSVP is a member of the Association of British Introduction Agencies, established in 1981 at the instigation of the OFT to provide clients with a way of accessing agencies that subscribe to a Code of Conduct.

To learn more about RSVP, visit www.rsvp-uk.com/about.htm.

Or view a brief history of RSVP at <http://www.rsvp-uk.com/documents/RSVPHistory.pdf>.

RSVP operates in London, Birmingham, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Luton, Milton Keynes, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Peterborough, Rutland, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands, Worcestershire.

Anne Stringer, RSVP Managing Director and Chief Matchmaker, is available for interview to discuss the content of this press release further. Anne is an articulate, media-savvy professional who is the point of reference on dating and relationships for BBC Radio Leicester, BBC Three Counties Radio, BBC Radio Northampton and many more. She has also appeared on ITV Anglia, LBC and in many newspapers and magazines. You can read/hear/watch examples of Anne's appearances on our media page here: www.rsvp-uk.com/media.htm.



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For editorial enquiries, please call 01536 421955 or email roland@rsvpgroup.co.uk.