

Many perils for online love seekers

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IBM Security said this week it found 26 of 41 mobile dating apps studied to be vulnerable to cyber-attacks that put personal user information and corporate data at risk

Advice for people seeking love on the Internet for Valentine's Day: keep looking, but watch for scams and other risks.

Security experts say hackers and other malicious actors often use the

occasion to target romance-seekers and the lovelorn.

The growing sector of [dating apps](#) that use [mobile technology](#) has led to new risks, according to researchers.

IBM Security said this week it found 26 of 41 mobile dating apps studied to be vulnerable to cyber-attacks that put personal user information and corporate data at risk.

Many dating applications can give access to a smartphone camera, microphone, storage, location and [mobile wallet](#) billing information, according to IBM.

"Many consumers use and trust their mobile phones for a variety of applications. It is this trust that gives hackers the opportunity to exploit vulnerabilities like the ones we found in these dating apps," said IBM Security vice president Caleb Barlow.

Other tried-and-true scam methods, many using email or social networks, can also be effective tools for fraudsters.

Malware, not flowers

Some use electronic greeting cards which infect a computer with malware. Others purport to be florists seeking to verify information for flower delivery.

Romance fraud schemes—mostly aimed at people over 40—consistently make top scam lists, according to the American Association of Retired Persons, which warns people to avoid clicking on links or responding to secret admirers online.

Security experts urge caution when potential dates seem too good to be

true, and quickly ask for money or personal information.

Scammers often typically meet their victims online through dating websites or social networking, and eventually ask for money using wire transfers or prepaid money cards, according to a warning from Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine.

DeWine's office said the state had received 90 complaints of "sweetheart" scams, with the average loss at \$22,000.

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"Online dating works well for many people, but you have to be very careful. Don't send money to someone you've never met in person."

DeWine urged people to be cautious when potential dates won't meet in person or claim to be in another country, with an urgent need for money.

An FBI warning from 2014 said the scammers "troll social media sites and chat rooms in search of romantic victims—usually claim to be Americans traveling or working abroad."

The most common targets are women over 40 who are divorced, widowed, or disabled, "but every age group and demographic is at risk," the FBI said.

It's not only in America: the City of London police said [online dating](#) fraud in Britain rose 33 percent in 2014, costing a total of 34 million

pounds (\$52 million).

There was a significant rise in fraud cases from April to May 2014, "suggesting that in the blissful wake of Valentine's Day people may become more susceptible to romance scams," the London police statement said.

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