



Customer Advisory: Avoid Forex, Precious Metals, and Digital Asset Romance Scams

The Commodity Futures Trading Commission advises the public to avoid offers to trade foreign currency contracts (forex), precious metal contracts, and digital assets with people they meet through dating apps or social media, even if the relationship has been building for weeks or months.

Romance scams can target people of any age, including individuals who are comfortable using online dating apps and trading forex, precious metals, and digital assets. The CFTC has received complaints about frauds that originated on dating apps and social media platforms. In many cases, the victims believed they were in romantic relationships that had formed over several weeks. These frauds are often conducted by people and entities outside the United States and use unregistered trading websites or third-party trading software.

Two Deceptions

Initial contact is made through dating apps, social media, or “wrong numbers” made through private messaging apps. The fraudsters commonly pose as executives, business owners, or successful financiers and use extensive social media personas to support their stories. They often share pictures of home-cooked meals and pets, and research the cities they’re supposedly from so they can reference restaurants and other sites. In a short amount of time, they are calling or texting daily, and using endearing language, but are too shy or unable to video chat or meet in person.

Over a few weeks, conversations subtly turn more and more to money and markets. The fraudsters may claim to be professional traders, trade as a hobby, or have a relative who is a successful trader. Their mood often is colored by their purported performance in the market. They tend to talk about their own extravagant spending, and probe the victims about salaries, debt, or money problems. They start to discuss future goals and dreams together as a couple, planning to meet each other soon. Once trust is built, the second phase of the scam begins. The fraudsters offer to introduce the victims to trading.

Heartbreaking Losses

The scams concentrate on trading digital assets, or trading foreign currency or dollar-gold contracts (also known as “forex”). In cases involving digital assets, victims are asked to buy virtual currency and transfer it to the scammer’s digital wallet or to a fraudulent trading platform. In cases involving forex trading, victims are told to download forex trading software or mobile apps. Money is then sent to an offshore company that manipulates the trading app to display winning trades and outsized returns, encouraging victims to invest more.

Victims are commonly encouraged to start small. The fraudsters may also walk them through a successful withdrawal to demonstrate the fraudulent broker or website can be trusted. Then, victims are nudged to invest more. Eventually, the victims may be faced with opportunities that require large investments. The offer may be made to couples only, or the love interest may offer to loan part of the required principal to the victim to demonstrate they’re “in this together.” The investment also may involve a sudden deadline or urgent decision.

After making significant investments, even as much as tens of thousands of dollars it becomes impossible to make withdrawals. Suddenly, there are taxes, commissions, or fees that must be paid. Customer service problems are another common ploy. Typically, the only way to resolve matters is to increase the investment. And, any talk of withdrawing money gets pushback from the love

interests, who have been in on the scam from the start. They become angry, and shame victims for their fear, mistrust, or lack of commitment.

When victims finally decide to get out, they face the stress of nonresponsive customer service operations and increasingly angry love interests who demand more money, or even blackmail victims by threatening to reveal compromising photos or messages. When victims ultimately refuse to pay, all communication stops, and the fraudulent trading website, “customer service” representative, “broker,” love interest, online profiles, and the victim’s money disappear.

Because the funds are commonly sent overseas or via virtual currency, recovering lost money is nearly impossible.

Dating App Fraud: 10 Ways to Protect Yourself and Your Money

1. Keep conversations on the dating or social media platforms. Many platforms utilize harmful language filters that can detect fraud. Fraudsters want to quickly move conversations to private messaging apps to avoid detection.
2. Screen capture the love interest’s profile picture or other pictures and use reverse image searches to see if they have been used in other scams or by other people.
3. If contacts refuse to meet or video chat, that should be a red flag. Try other ways to verify their identities in real-time. For example, ask the person to send a selfie holding a piece of paper with your name and date next to his or her face.
4. Check to be sure the people or firms you trade with are registered with federal or state authorities. Relying on registration alone won’t protect you from fraud, but most scams involve unregistered entities, people, and products. Learn more, visit **[cftc.gov/check](https://www.cftc.gov/check)**.
 - For forex trading, check with the National Futures Association, **[nfa.futures.org/basicnet](https://www.nfa.futures.org/basicnet)**.
 - For virtual currency, see if the platform is registered as a money service business with the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (**[fincen.gov/msb-registrant-search](https://www.fincen.gov/msb-registrant-search)**) or with your state using the Nationwide Multistate Licensing System (**[csbs.org/nationwide-multistate-licensing-system](https://www.csbs.org/nationwide-multistate-licensing-system)**).
5. Never make payments or give sensitive information to anyone you’ve only met online.
6. Before making any investment, get a second opinion. Talk it over with a financial advisor, trusted friend, or family member.
7. Don’t trade in markets or products you don’t fully understand.
8. Never pay more money to get your money back. If you suspect fraud, report it immediately to the Internet Crime Complaint Center, **[ic3.gov](https://www.ic3.gov)**, or **[cftc.gov/complaint](https://www.cftc.gov/complaint)**.
9. Learn more about romance scams at **[consumer.ftc.gov](https://www.consumer.ftc.gov)** or other reliable websites.
10. Learn more about spotting and avoiding forex, precious metals, or digital asset frauds, and stay current on developing trends, visit **[cftc.gov/LearnAndProtect](https://www.cftc.gov/LearnAndProtect)**.

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