

World Romance Scam Prevention Day: Fighting scammers and supporting victims

To mark World Romance Scam Prevention Day, the Online Dating and Discovery Association (ODDA) is using the month of October to raise awareness of the issue and highlight what our members are doing to remove scammers from their sites. We're also looking at how technology is helping platforms keep their users safe from online harm.

In this article, the ODDAs Simon Newman (SN) talks to Nicola Staub (NS) from scam-fighting specialists Cybera. Nicola is a former Swiss public prosecutor with years of experience in law enforcement and a specialisation in fighting global financial cybercrime.

CYBERA™

SN: According to recent figures produced by one of the UKs largest banks, romance fraud has risen by a fifth in the last 12 months. As a company specialising in fighting online scammers, what trends are you seeing?

NS: Our platform helps over 20 scam and fraud victims daily, partnering with banks, crypto exchanges and non-profits. We've noticed a sharp rise in romance scam cases, especially those combined with investment scams, often referred to as "pig butchering." Victims are frequently convinced to invest in fake crypto platforms, believing it's a legitimate opportunity.

SN: Once someone has been scammed, where does the money go? Does it follow a similar pattern?

NS: Yes, especially with larger sums. Scammers typically trick victims into wiring money to a "money mule" account, with about 50% of these accounts being overseas. Increasingly, scams involve crypto payments, which require tracing to determine where the funds went. We assist with this process and often identify exchanges where funds might be frozen.

SN: Can you tell us anything about the types of people committing these scams? Are they organised crime gangs or opportunist criminals?

NS: The vast majority are organised crime groups. Hotspots include Nigeria and Southeast Asia, but scams span multiple countries, with infrastructure (banks and crypto exchanges) involved globally. Organised crime groups, including the Italian mafia and Chinese syndicates, are increasingly moving into this space, making it a significant global issue.

SN: One of the reasons you set up Cybera was to help victims, having spent years as a public prosecutor in Switzerland. You've recently launched a scam support programme and I wondered if you could tell us more about it?

NS: Absolutely. As a prosecutor, I saw firsthand how difficult it is to catch scammers. Where we could help was in quickly alerting banks and exchanges to freeze funds, but most victims didn't have access to this support. That's why we launched CYBERA and its scam support program, partnering with banks, crypto exchanges, and even the Swiss police to guide victims on reporting and asset recovery as quickly as possible, which is key to freezing funds.

SN: Can you also tell us about anti-scam intelligence? How does this help?

NS: We assist victims daily and have helped freeze millions of dollars, enabling asset recovery. We also share scam intelligence with partners, including banks, exchanges, and dating platforms, to prevent scams. Since scammers reuse the same details (emails, phone numbers, bank accounts, wallets), sharing this intelligence helps block scammers and prevent payments. We've expanded our efforts to ethically engage scammers and source bank accounts and wallets before a single victim loses money, with over 1,000 accounts sourced last month alone.

SN: What advice would you give to our members who want keep scammers off their sites?

NS: Education is key, but it's not enough. I recommend using technology to detect scams and leveraging high-quality intel about scammers. For example, we provide scammer emails that should be blocked if a user registers with them. Additionally, supporting victims is crucial. Many are left without help, so we offer our Scam Support Program free of charge to members of the ODDA, providing a simple way to assist victims and, in some cases, recover funds.

SN: Finally, can you tell us a bit more about Cybera?

NS: Sure. We're based in the U.S. and Europe, with roots in Switzerland. Our main focus is helping banks and crypto exchanges prevent scams, but we're expanding to digital platforms like online dating. It's not only the right thing to do, but also a key differentiator for dating platforms. No one wants to find love on a site filled with scammers. We're VC-backed, growing quickly, and committed to making a real difference by fighting scams alongside our partners and for the victims.

SN: Thank you for your time Nicola.

You can find more about Cybera on their website: www.cybera.io