

# For the love of money

## Seasonal scams: Romance ruses & tax tricks

For many people, February is a double dose of responsibility as we celebrate Valentine's Day and prepare for Tax Day. While both tax scams and romance scams are problems year-round, they jump into high gear during the first months of the new year.

The two attack types may seem very different, but they rely on the same human weaknesses. Let's explore them.

When it comes to romance, scammers exploit desire for love and companionship. They use a fake persona online to gain affection and trust, then leverage that trust to manipulate people for money and data.

Romance scammers often succeed, to the tune of thousands or even millions of dollars<sup>1</sup> — because their victims are emotionally invested.

Emotion plays a part in tax scams as well. Tax scammers often tell victims that they are eligible for massive refunds ... or that they owe considerable debts. Victims will happily pay to "release" the refund or make an installment on the fake debt. The scammer plays on desire for money and fear of legal consequences.

With any scam, your best defense is being suspicious. Don't trust offers or people that come out of nowhere. Ask yourself: Could this be a trick? If it is a trick, what do they get?

### Signs of a romance scam



**Love bombing:** The scammer overwhelms you with excessive gifts, compliments, and declarations of affection. The goal is to create a strong emotional bond as quickly as possible.



**Isolation:** The scammer warns you not to listen to family or friends who might question your relationship with them.



**Crisis:** Once they've created the bond, the scammer starts asking you for regular financial assistance. They claim something tragic has happened: "My dog was hit by a car"; "I need to move out of an unsafe home".



**Targeted demands:** The scammer will not accept non-monetary assistance or gifts. They often ask for gift cards, which are nearly impossible to trace or refund.

## Stick to trusted tax preparers

If you're using a tax preparation service, it's critical to stick to known and trusted companies. If your current preparer has worked in the past, don't be tempted by new offers saying things such as "We use AI to optimize your return!" or "Guaranteed maximum refund!" It's easy for scammers to create a fake company, accept tax return information, then vanish with your personal data and money. Sometimes, the old reliable methods — and service providers — are your best bet!



1. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndoh/pr/ghanaian-national-charged-running-romance-scams-took-over-8-million-elderly-victims>