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## Nigerian Scams on the Rise!

**You stand to lose BIG if you fall for one of these ruses.**

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I've now received several reports from homebased businesses on the Web who almost became victims of the Nigerian scam artists. It always begins with someone overseas who says they want to place a large order for products advertised on a company's Web site. What they're really trying to do, however (besides order with stolen credit cards), is get the business owner to go out and buy other merchandise for them and ship it along with the ordered merchandise.

I first wrote about this scam in my [September 2003 newsletter](#). Here are three more recent reports from my readers to give you a better idea of the specific ways in which these scammers operate, and the kind of e-mails they send. Note that some are very poorly written with many errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation, while others look very professional.

Small craft and home businesses, as well as Christian retailers, seem to be a major target now, but anyone who sells merchandise on the Web is apt to be approached. This article includes links for more information and where to report suspicious activity. **If you know anyone who needs this information, please link them to this Web page.**

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 **A report from Joan Green, JoanGreenDesigns.com:** "In the space of one week, I received three very suspicious inquiries from Lagos, Nigeria--all of them wanting to order kits, pattern packs and some yarn. They ordered in quantities as if they were buying for shops, but none asked for wholesale prices. The last fellow actually said he was an international businessman and was in Nigeria to open up a new store and learn more about the African way of life. All of these people said they saw the things on my site, but instead of just placing an order there, they e-mailed me to ask how much the order would be with air-mail shipping, and said they would provide me with a credit card number when they had this information.

"Before I figured out this whole thing was a scam, I wasted a lot of time figuring out shipping costs via different methods and for different weights. One woman insisted on UPS shipment even though it came out to about four times what air mail shipment would have been. While I was wondering about all this, a woman at the bank told my husband that they had been having trouble with credit cards from Nigeria. But I figured if I keyed in their card numbers on my machine, and the cards were not declined, they should be good. (I didn't know then that the cards being used by these scammers have been stolen in the first place.)"

Fortunately, Joan contacted me before shipping any of these orders, and a little while later, she told me the rest of the story. "After quoting shipping prices to all three buyers, ALL THREE of them asked me to go out and buy Nokia phones and add that to their orders! Yeah, right!"

### A report from artist Jennifer Davis

"I received a strange email this morning that resembles the one discussed in your newsletter. When I tried to search for information about the sender of the e-mail, your warning was the only thing I found. Thank you so much for posting it. I am including the e-mail below for your information."

*Sir/Madam,*

*Good day to you. I am a Business woman who owns and operate a Gallery in United Kingdom, with a new branch in Nigeria. I have got the list of what to Order for, presently I'm in the United Kingdom on a business trip, I will like you to give me the Shipping Cost to Nigeria for the below listed items and how long it will take this goods to arrive in my new branch Gallery in Nigeria:*

*Paintings: This goods are needed urgently in my Gallery. Reply as soon as possible and let me know the Total cost for the items listed above plus the Shipping and Handling cost including the tax, I will be paying you with credit card and also the shipping should be via UPS 3-5Days shipment. I shall be waiting to read from you as soon as possible.- Best regards,*

*Mrs. Tonia Kluivert, Managing Director  
Tonia Paintings Gallery :  
33, Nightingale Vale,  
Woolwich Common,  
London.  
SE18 4EN.  
Tel: +44-870-167-0418  
E-mail: [tonia\\_kluivert@hotmail.com](mailto:tonia_kluivert@hotmail.com)*

*Tonia Paintings Gallery:  
34, Ojekunle Street,  
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Lagos State. Nigeria. 23401.  
E-mail: [tonia\\_kluivert@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:tonia_kluivert@yahoo.co.uk)*

**Ed. Note:** Notice how much contact information has been provided here to make the order look legitimate? But as I explained in **my first discussion of this problem** (*The Hazards of Handling Foreign Orders*), when one seller

took the time to really check out the contact information, she found that the telephone number was not active and, although the address existed, there was no store there.

### **Variation-on-a-Theme Report from Frank Gosar:**

Following is an interesting variation of the same scam--different person, same unusual address--as reported by ceramicist **Frank Gosar**, who writes: "Thanks for the heads-up about Nigerian credit card scams, and especially for including complete message texts. I got the message below today; I get these fairly often, especially around Christmas, but the wording of this one seemed slightly fishy (I think it was the non-specificity--I have five different kinds of 'Animal Handled Mugs'.)

"In any event, I Googled 'Ojekunle Papa Ajao' and came up with your Web page. As you'll note, they've changed their story a little since word has gotten out. 'Dennis' is no longer claiming to be an African businessman, nor is he buying wholesale quantities; just a nice guy wanting to send a present, FedEx, to his wife . . . at a notorious address in Nigeria.

*Hello*

*I have visited your website and i am impressed by the beautiful collection you have there. I want to purchase this particular piece for my wife's birthday: Animal-handled mugs*

*Get back to me with the total cost and the shipping cost via Fedex delivery to this address:*

*24,Ojekunle Papa Ajao  
Mushin  
Lagos State  
Nigeria  
23401*

*I look forward to hearing from you,. so you can have my credit card charge into your account for the payment.*

*Best Regards  
Dennis*

### **A report from Patricia Banker, SaintsPreserved.com:**

"The Nigerians are still at it and this time I almost fell for it (and I consider myself pretty savvy, even cynical). They are now targeting Christian retail sites and artists. When I got an e-mail order for over \$1500 a few days ago, I was skeptical, but I always believe in giving the benefit of the doubt. 'Roseline' told me she has a shop and needs my products 'urgently' and would pay me with her credit card immediately. A few things just didn't seem right, but I blamed it on the language gap. At first I figured I had nothing to lose if I got a guaranteed pick-up receipt from the USPS. My merchant account screens and approves all transactions, so even if it wasn't a valid card, I figured I would be protected since I wouldn't ship until it went through. But first, I did a search for the latest Nigerian scams and I found some interesting things.

"For one thing, they keep changing credit card numbers by one digit till they hit one that works. Bingo! Once they know it's a good one, they use it for all it's worth. There are also other ways this scam works. (Note that it isn't always a

Nigerian shipping address; sometimes the shipping address is in the States."

Later, Patricia wrote to say that she had decided to string 'Roseline Cambell' on a bit, thinking she would report everything to her merchant account company as soon as an attempt was made to use the card. So she wrote back, saying:

*Dear Roseline: I have calculated the postage and it will be \$135.00, plus \$12.50 for confirmation (5-10 days air). I will apply the 40% discount to your credit card before I charge your account. The easiest way is to go to this link:*

*<http://store.yahoo.com/stmaker/ancurcol.html> and order them from there. For security reasons, I do not take credit card orders via e-mail. If you wish to place it via phone, please call 248.219.2693 anytime. Western Union transfers are fine and I will give you an additional 1% discount. I am very curious about your store. What is the name and what do you sell? Sincerely, Patricia*

#### **And here's the reply Patricia received (errors and all):**

*Hello, thanks for your response.please i need your help.i willbe getting married very soon and my inlaws are coming from a far away states and i will like to offer them a very good and admirable camera phone.please i want you to help me get the prices of the 5 units of any of the camera phone listed below: samsungE715 sony erisson Z600 nokia 7200 and samsung VGA1000 i will be expecting the price quotes as soon as possible. kindest regards, roseline cambell*

As Patricia was mulling over this last message, she was on hold on her phone with a relay service for the deaf. Who should it be from but Roseline Cambell. Fortunately, Patricia had also learned that these crooks are now using the legitimate relay service for a free phone call and to disguise themselves (see link below). "The more I learn about all this, the more furious I get," she told me. "I hope the reason 'Roseline' was so persistent was that she/he hasn't had any bites from anyone else lately. Anyway, the call faded out after 15 minutes."

#### **Report from a Christian Bookstore Owner:**

I wish I had read your article sooner and I'd be \$1500 richer, writes Karen U, who was duped by two men from Nigeria. "I own a small Christian bookstore and was foolish enough or greedy enough to send goods from my store to the cheats. We Christians are either very trusting or very stupid. We heard about the scam just before we sent another box. A saleswoman came to the store and wondered why we had our phone tied up for so long. Yes, you guessed it. It was the relay phone messages from a man in Nigeria. She told us about a small bookstore owner she knew who had lost big time to the same type of bums. Now we are smarter and less trusting, I hope, and will check out things more carefully next time. We did call the banks and found the credit card numbers were not valid. Why did we not do that first?? Poor thinking! How can this message be gotten out across the country. This needs to be told!"

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

[http://www.cbaonline.org/MarketPlace/\\_Fraud.jsp](http://www.cbaonline.org/MarketPlace/_Fraud.jsp) - A good place to find out more about the problems related to orders from Nigeria, including what to do about them and how to help. An article on this site reports that "Christian retailers are continuing to be hit with scams requesting big orders

in quantity or price and inviting them to participate in transferring funds into their U.S. bank accounts. Some even involve sending checks to prepay for goods."

<http://www.dailystar.com/dailystar/dailystar/17393.php> - Tim Steller, reporter for the *Arizona Daily Star*, reports on how overseas scam artists have hijacked a telephone relay system for deaf people and turned phone operators in Tucson and nationwide into full-time facilitators of fraud. One call center reported that it had been receiving at least 7,000 Internet-relay calls a day, and another 19,000 or more have been going to other call centers operated by the same company.

**Final Thoughts . . .** If you're doing business on the Web, or merely Web surfing, you simply **MUST** develop a suspicious nature and not automatically trust everyone, especially someone from Nigeria who is trying to place a large order. Please forward this Web page, or its link, to friends on the Web, and include it in your craft/home-business newsletters or mailing list discussions as well.

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# Internet Scammers Keep Working in Nigeria

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By DULUE MBACHU

LAGOS, Nigeria (AP) - In Festac Town, an entire community of scammers overnights on the Internet. By day they flaunt their smart clothes and cars and hang around the Internet cafes, trading stories about successful cons and near misses, and hatching new plots.

Festac Town is where communication specialists operating underground sell foreign telephone lines over which a scammer can purport to be calling from any city in the world. Here lurk master forgers and purveyors of such software as "e-mail extractors," which can harvest e-mail addresses by the million. Now, however, a 3-year-old crackdown is yielding results, Nigerian authorities say.

Nuhu Ribadu, head of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, says cash and assets worth more than \$700 million were recovered from suspects between May 2003 and June 2004. More than 500 suspects have been arrested, more than 100 cases are before the courts and 500 others are under investigation, he said.

The agency won its first big court victory in May when Mike Amadi was sentenced to 16 years in prison for setting up a Web site that offered juicy but phoney procurement contracts. Amadi cheekily posed as Ribadu himself and used the agency's name. He was caught by an undercover agent posing as an Italian businessman.

This month the biggest international scam of all - though not one involving the Internet - ended in court convictions. Amaka Anajemba was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison and ordered to return \$25.5 million of the \$242 million she helped to steal from a Brazilian bank.

The trial of four co-defendants is to start in September.

Day in, day out, a strapping, amiable 24-year-old who calls himself Kele B. heads to an Internet cafe, hunkers down at a computer and casts his net upon the cyber-waters.

Blithely oblivious to signs on the walls and desks warning of the penalties for Internet fraud, he has sent out tens of thousands of e-mails telling recipients they have won about \$6.4 million in a bogus British government "Internet lottery."

"Congratulation! You Are Our Lucky Winner!" it says.

So far, Kele says, he has had only one response. But he claims it paid off handsomely. An American took the bait, he says, and coughed up "fees" and "taxes" of more than \$5,000, never to hear from Kele again.

Festac Town, a district of Lagos where the scammers ply their schemes, has become notorious for "419 scams," named for the section of the Nigerian penal code that outlaws them.

Why Nigeria? There are many theories. The nation of 130 million, Africa's most populous, is well educated, and English, the lingua franca of the scam industry, is the official language. Nigeria bursts with talent, from former NBA star Hakeem Olajuwon to Nobel literature laureate Wole Soyinka.

But with World Bank studies showing a quarter of urban college graduates are unemployed, crime offers tempting career opportunities - in drug dealing, immigrant-trafficking, oil-smuggling, and Internet fraud.

The scammers thrived during oil-rich Nigeria's 15 years of brutal and corrupt military rule, and democracy was restored only six years ago.

"We reached a point when law enforcement and regulatory agencies seemed nonexistent. But the stance of the present administration has started changing that," said Ribadu, the scam-busting chief.

President Olusegun Obasanjo is winning U.S. praise for his crackdown. Interpol, the FBI and other Western law enforcement agencies have stepped in to help, says police spokesman Emmanuel Ighodalo, and Nigerian police have received equipment and Western training in combating Internet crime and money-laundering.

Experts say Nigerian scams continue to flood e-mail systems, though many are being blocked by spam filters that get smarter and more aggressive. America Online Inc. Nicholas Graham says Nigerian messages lack the telltale signs of other spam - such as embedded Web links - but its filters are able to be alert to suspect mail coming from a specific range of Internet addresses.

Also, the scams have a limited shelf life.

In the con that Internet users are probably most familiar with, the e-mailer poses as a corrupt official looking for help in smuggling a fortune to a foreign bank account. E-mail or fax recipients are told that if they provide their banking and personal details and deposit certain sums of money, they'll get a cut of the loot.

But there are other scams, like the fake lotteries.

Kele B., who won't give his surname, says he couldn't find work after finishing high school in 2000 in the southeastern city of Owerri, so he drifted with friends to Lagos, where he tried his hand at boxing.

Then he discovered the Web.

Now he spends his mornings in Internet cafes on secondhand computers with aged screens, waiting "to see if my trap caught something," he says.

Elekwa, a chubby-faced 28-year-old who also keeps his surname to himself, shows up in Festac Town driving a Lexus and telling how he was jobless for two years despite having a diploma in computer science.

His break came four years ago when the chief of a fraud gang saw him solve what seemed like "a complex computer problem" at a business center in the southeastern city of Umuahia and lured him to Lagos.

He won't talk about his scams, only about their fruits: "Now I have three cars, I have two houses and I'm not looking for a job anymore."