

Overall Top Ten Scams

Rank	Scam Type	% of total
1	Internet: Gen Merchandise	26.31%
2	Prizes/Sweepstakes/Free Gifts	23.78%
3	Phishing/Spoofing	12.67%
4	Fake Check Scams	8.78%
5	Friendship & Sweetheart Swindles	5.67%
6	Advance Fee Loans, Credit Arrangers	3.97%
7	Computers: Equipment/Software	2.54%
8	Family/ Friend Imposter	1.31%
9	Investments: Other (note in comments)	1.14%
10	Internet: Extortion Scams	0.91%

Top Internet Scams

Rank	Scam Type	% of total
1	Internet: Gen Merchandise	41.88%
2	Phishing/Spoofing	11.20%
3	Fake Check Scams	10.06%
4	Friendship & Sweetheart Swindles	9.01%
5	Prizes/Sweepstakes/Free Gifts	5.11%
6	Advance Fee Loans, Credit Arrangers	4.25%
7	Computers: Equipment/Software	2.03%
8	Internet: Auctions	1.49%
9	Investments: Other (note in comments)	1.43%
10	Internet: Extortion Scams	1.36%

Top Offline Scams

Rank	Scam Type	% of total
1	Prizes/Sweepstakes/Free Gifts	46.72%
2	Phishing/Spoofing	14.47%
3	Fake Check Scams	7.22%
4	Internet: Gen Merchandise	7.18%
5	Advance Fee Loans, Credit Arrangers	3.63%
6	Computers: Equipment/Software	3.16%
7	Friendship & Sweetheart Swindles	1.56%
8	Family/ Friend Imposter	1.48%
9	Recovery/Refund Companies	1.13%
10	Medical Care Products/Services	0.94%

MEET THE SCAMS

A look at the most reported frauds

Internet: General Merchandise Sales (*not auctions*)

Goods purchased are either never delivered or misrepresented

Prizes/Sweepstakes/Free Gifts

Requests for payment to claim fictitious prizes, lottery winnings, or gifts

Phishing/Spoofing

Emails pretending to be from a well-known source ask consumers to enter or confirm personal information

Fake Check Scams

Consumers paid with phony checks for work or for items they're trying to sell, instructed to wire money back to buyer

Friendship & Sweetheart Swindles

Con artist nurtures an online relationship, builds trust, and convinces victim to send money

Advance Fee Loans, Credit Arrangers

False promises of business or personal loans, even if credit is bad, for a fee upfront

Computers: Equipment and Software

Scammers claim to offer "technical support" for computer problems and charge a fee to fix a nonexistent problem

Family and Friend Imposters

A scammer calls or emails, claiming that a friend or family member is in distress (in jail, in the hospital, etc.) and urgently needs funds to help

Investments

Investment opportunities in: day trading; gold and gems; art; rare coins; other investment products; reports about companies that offer advice or seminars on investments; etc.

Internet: Extortion Scams

Consumer threatened with release of embarrassing information or other adverse outcomes unless a fee is paid

This year's headlines

The recession is fueling a rise in get-rich-quick schemes, romance scams.

With millions of Americans out of work and struggling to make ends meet due to the COVID-19 pandemic, scammers looked to take advantage of consumers' financial struggles in 2020. The number of complaints we received at Fraud.org regarding **bogus prizes, sweepstakes, and free gifts** nearly doubled in 2020 versus what we received in 2019. Overall, such scams were the second most reported type of scam last year, making up nearly a quarter (23.78%) of all the complaints filed at Fraud.org.

Another growing scam in 2020 were friendship and sweetheart scams, also known as **romance scams**. The number of complaints about such scams increased by 30.06% in 2020, making it the fifth-most reported category of scam, with a median loss of \$1,628. Given the social isolation brought on by the COVID pandemic, this data underscores the rising risk of such scams.

The overall top scam in 2019—**Internet merchandise scams**—remained unchanged retained its spot from 2019, making up 1 in 4 of the complaints we received. These scams involve merchandise purchased from bogus websites selling discounted items such as luxury apparel, electronics, and supplements or medications.

Younger consumers and seniors are being targeted more frequently.

The percentage of complaints received from consumers aged 26-65 decreased by an average of 8.76% in 2020. By comparison, complaints from consumers aged 25 and below and those 65 and older increased by an average of 30.60% and 15.82%, respectively versus 2019. For consumers aged 25 and under, the top three most reported fraud categories were Internet merchandise scams, fake check scams, and romance scams. For those 65 and older, the top complaint categories were prize/sweepstakes scams, phishing/spoofing, and Internet merchandise scams.

The Web and the telephone remain scammers' preferred contact methods

With email spam filters growing increasingly successful at blocking out scam emails, fraudsters continued to turn to the Web and the telephone to find victims. Those two contact methods were mentioned in more than 81% of the complaints (Web: 47.34%; Telephone: 34.28%). This data highlights the need for consumers to be wary when responding to messages from unknown senders, particularly those encountered on social media. Consumers should also continue to be on guard for unknown callers seeking to offer them prizes or other inducements to send money, as these made up nearly half (46.72%) of the complaints received where the scammer made contact over the phone.

Method of Contact	% of Total
Websites	47.34%
Phone	34.28%
Email	7.69%
In person	4.24%
Postal mail	4.54%
Other (in person, tv/radio, print, fax, etc.)	1.90%

Consumer Age	% of Total
Under 18	0.71%
18-25	13.39%
26-35	15.54%
36-45	16.38%
46-55	14.00%
56-65	15.94%
Above 65	24.05%

Payment Method	% of Total
Credit card	44.03%
Wire transfer	24.57%
Bank debit card	14.44%
Other*	8.02%
Bank account debit	5.13%
Check	3.80%

* Includes payment via cash, cashier's check, money order, cash advance, trade, telephone bill, gift cards



Fraud.org is a program of the National Consumers League.

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