

419 SCAMS - WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?

Let me paint the scene, you are sitting in your uncomfortable chair in front of your too-slow workstation, lounging in your o-so-big cubicle. Suddenly, you receive an email, this email offers you riches beyond your wildest dreams of avarice if you just trust the sender and send them some details. Guess what? You have just gotten a 419 scam email, cue the cheesy drum roll sound effect. Lets look at this in more detail...

What is it?

Well, the sender is a criminal who wants to empty your bank account, to do this he needs some details regarding the account. They get this by offering their victims lots of money, letting greed work it's magic. Once they have the details they empty the account. Thats about it. The details differ on the stories used and how believable they are but the aim and the end result remain the same. Take a look at this example 419 email..

Dear Sir/Madam

I am the eldest son of the late Henri Obi Kabongo (a foremost human rights activist in the Democratic Republic of Congo). My father died in March 2000 as a result of the inhumane treatment meted out on him while in prison by the government of Laurent Kabila. However, it is particularly important to mention here that before the death of my father, he was a successful businessman and his business empire includes real estate, exportation, and consultancy services which cut across Africa. He was able to accumulate enough money both in local and foreign currencies through his business empire. In fact, he was at one time rated among the first five richest Congolese businessmen by one of the leading business magazines in my country. His entire business has been on the upward trend over the past ten years, bringing his net profit during the period under review to Twenty one million U.S dollars (\$21,000,000). This of course does not include his assets which are already running into millions of dollars. Having said all this, there was a twist in my father's success story following his confrontation with the government of Laurent Kabila who has been quite high-handed and dictatorial in his policies and day-to-day running of the affairs of the Congolese people. My father being a human rights activist, criticised his government in both local and international newspapers. This infuriated him and he clamped my father in jail until he died in March last year due to ill health. Fortunately, before the arrest of my father, his attorney acting upon his instructions, transferred the sum of Twenty one million U.S dollars (\$21,000,000) from his local banks to a security firm overseas. He did this for fear of this accounts being frozen by the government. Following my father's death, my entire family decided to seek political assylum in Lome-Togo, as the eldest son of my late father and according to our tradition in Africa. I have now inherited all my father's wealth. Considering the present face-off between Kabila and my family, I was then advised by my father's attorney (presently my attorney) to seek the assistance of someone based in your country to receive the amount in question being (\$21,000,000). Since I have the intention of relocating my family there with the aim of settling down there and investing. I have decided to give you 5% of the total amount involved and I have also set aside 5% for any expenses that might be incurred in the course of this transaction. To finalize this transaction you will have to contact me via my e-mail address (xxxxxi@mail.com). further discussions will be centered on how and when we shall be meet after the fund is in your account. I shall expect you to keep this transaction confidential due to the present circumstance of my family and I urgently await your response.

Yours faithfully
Peter Obi

Don't you you just feel the urge to contact this poor soul and help him out? If you do please contact me as as well, I've got this bridge in Brooklyn I am trying to sell, I'll even throw in this old tower I have in Paris....

Does It Actually Work?

Do people actually fall for this scam? In a word ... YES. It works because of one inescapable fact of human nature - Greed. And if you think this is a new thing, think again. The earliest record of this type of scam was from the 1920's, when it was known as the Spanish Prisoner scam. People were asked to help secure the release from prison of the son of a wealthy Spanish family, who would -of course- be very financially grateful. But the result then was the same as now, the victims ended up out of pocket. The modern day problem has gotten so bad, that in the US the estimated loss is in the Millions of dollars. In fact, the secret service have a web page dedicated to it: <http://www.secretservice.gov/alert419.shtml>. Or take a look at the [419 coalition website](#).

Do They Know Who I Am?

While the email ends up in your inbox, that does not mean the sender knows of you personally, they just want you to feel that way. Rather, the email finds you in the same way that normal, everyday spam (damn, that sounds strange) does. People selling email lists, buying email lists, trawling the web, the victim making their email address known, or any other spammer trick. The 419 sent out hundreds of these emails looking for that one greedy sucker (one born every minute).

What Can I Do?

Well, you can use any of the normal anti-spam techniques but a simple solution is to follow a simple rule: *If it seems to good to be true, thats because it is!* Do not be greedy and you won't get caught. If you are one of those crusading types, take a look at an [anti-419 scam](#) website, it is good for a laugh.