

From Russia, With Love

You can imagine my surprise when I received an email entitled "The lonely, kind, cheerful girl searches for the beloved". In the message it was related to me that this 29 year-old woman from Russia, who doesn't think that age and appearance are too important (but who is pretty), wants to find her beloved and have a family.



Randy Abrams

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I replied back and told Tatyana, that I didn't think my wife would accept me having another woman in my life! Normally I would have simply deleted such an email, but I needed something to write about and I immediately recognized an old scam, so I decided to collect some firsthand evidence. Generally, I do not recommend replying to these types of emails. The best you can hope for is to be ignored, but much more spam is a distinct possibility. Of course, if you are in the spam collection business then it might not be so bad!

I should mention something about the nature of the scams. There are a variety of "foreign bride" scams. This isn't to say there are not "legitimate" agencies helping foreign women find American husbands. This definitely does happen and is a business. Since it is a business, there are also dishonest business people. The Illinois Business Law Journal has an interesting article about "mail order brides" at http://iblsjournal.typepad.com/illinois_business_law_soc/2008/02/the-mail-order.html

One version of the scam is a promise of a bride, but you have to join a club, or an agency, or pay fees to contact a woman. Once the money is sent off that is the last you see of it. Another scam approach involves a series of "getting to know you" emails. At some point when the "woman" believes she has won your heart, she then wants to fly out to meet you, but needs money for airfare.

I exchanged about 5 emails with this "Tatyana", who is probably a man somewhere in Russia. In each and every case a search of the text revealed significant portions of the text in similar emails from people with several different names.

Part of the reason scams are so common on the Internet is that the level of automation used makes it very inexpensive in both money and time to perpetrate the crimes. This can work to an astute person's advantage. Many of the hoaxes and scams use the same text over and over and a quick search reveals the nature of the beast. The ones using poor English grammar are the easiest to find as they provide very unique search strings.

If you wish to submit questions or comments to "Ask the Expert" please feel free to send them to askeset@eset.com.



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