



Project Synergy takes the sting out of scams

Nigerian fraud scams dupe thousands of Australians each year into giving money—approximately \$2.5 million dollars per month—to fraudsters over the Internet.

This figure does not include money lost to scams from other countries which would push the estimated national loss to many millions more.

The social impact of these scams has been devastating and many victims have been ruined by their involvement. People have lost

Do you respond to uninitiated emails, faxes, communications, enter into investments with people you've never met, or send cash to people you do not know overseas?

their life savings, homes and businesses, or have had their families torn apart. Many are on medication for depression and numerous have attempted suicide. One family has lost in excess of \$5 million.

In 2006, the Fraud and Corporate Crime Group (FCCG) launched Operation Echo Track to disrupt and monitor fraudulent funds being transferred to Nigeria. The operation discovered how widespread Nigerian fraud had become and the adverse impact it made upon the lives of its victims.

Detective Superintendent Brian Hay, FCCG Operations Commander, said one of the reasons fraud scams were so effective was that they appealed to some basic human instincts.

“Thousands of people across Australia have been taken in, despite being well-educated,” Detective Superintendent Hay said.

“Many would say greed is a component, but I don’t agree. I think people see it as an opportunity to improve their lives, get ahead.

“The perpetrators of fraud provide hopes and dreams and victims are vulnerable to that. People get excited about the thought of making a lot of money.”

Fraud scams invariably snare their victims by convincing them there is easy money to be made.

The money may purportedly be coming from an unexpected inheritance, a secret bank account, an overpaid government contract,

a charity, or a forgotten sum of money left in a Nigerian bank.

Fraudsters use various methods to extract funds, such as insisting taxes, legal fees, company registration costs, money transfer charges or insurance costs be paid before the money is transferred.

Despite paying the fees, there are always delays which prevent the money from being transferred, followed by reasons for further payments to be made.

Superintendent Hay said despite Queenslanders accounting for an estimated one fifth of the national monetary loss, one of the biggest issues was convincing people to come forward.

“Victims have historically been reluctant to report being