

'Dear, did you say pastry?': meet the 'AI granny' driving scammers up the wall

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Discuss in pairs or groups

- Have you ever been a victim of online fraud?
- What are some common scams?
- Do you protect yourself from online fraud? How?

2 Key words

a. Write the correct words from the wordpool to complete the definitions below. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

frustrate	pastry	call centre	fraud
scammer	upgrade	knitting	waste
blank	persona	furious	awareness

1. Someone who attempts to trick others to steal their money or personal information is a(n) _____.
2. To be _____ is to be extremely angry.
3. _____ is the crime of deceiving people to gain money or personal benefits illegally.
4. To _____ is to use something in a way that is not useful, effective or valuable.
5. To make someone feel annoyed or impatient because they cannot do what they want is to _____ them.
6. _____ is making clothes or other objects by using two long needles to connect yarn or another type of thread into connected rows.
7. A(n) _____ is a type of sweet food made from special flour dough and usually containing something such as fruit or nuts.

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8. Something empty, without any writing, marks or images is _____.
9. To _____ something is to improve it by adding or replacing parts of it.
10. _____ is having knowledge or understanding of a subject, issue or situation.
11. Someone's _____ is the part of their character that is presented to or seen by others.
12. A(n) _____ is a place where large numbers of people work to handle incoming or outgoing telephone calls.

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You may have to change the form of the word.

1. My grandmother taught me how to _____ blankets and scarves when I was ten years old.
2. The constant website errors _____ customers because they couldn't complete their online purchases.
3. The _____ pretended to work at her bank to get her password.
4. The customer was _____ when the airline lost his suitcase for the second time.
5. The insurance company investigated the claim because they suspected _____.
6. The advert aims to raise _____ about the dangers of texting while driving.
7. The IT department will add new features to _____ the security on our computers next weekend.
8. The company opened new _____ in three different countries to provide 24-hour customer support.

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Shane Hickey
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- 1 Like many people, "Daisy" receives a lot of calls from scammers who try to take control of her computer after saying she has been hacked.
- 2 But because she asks about whether they like tea, the criminals end up furious rather than successful.
- 3 Daisy is not a real grandmother but an AI bot created to fight fraud. Her task is to waste the scammers' time.
- 4 O2 rolled out "AI granny" Daisy to show what artificial intelligence can do to fight scammers.
- 5 Because she's confused about how computers work and eager to talk about her younger days, Daisy can frustrate the scammers on the other end of the line. In one call, a scammer tells her that her computer is full of viruses and tries to take control of it. He waits while she looks for her glasses and tries to turn it on and find the Internet Explorer icon.
- 6 "You know, back in my day we didn't have all this technology. Everything was much simpler. What about you, dear?" she says. He reacts with anger, saying that her "profession is bothering people". Daisy says, "I wouldn't want to bother anyone. I'm just trying to have a little chat."
- 7 In another call, Daisy delays the scammer by talking about how she usually just uses it for knitting patterns and scone recipes. "I see a lot of options, dear. It says things like back, forward, reload and, oh, what's this? Save as. How do I find the homepage?" she asks.
- 8 A third scammer tries to get her to download the Google Play Store, and she replies: "Dear, did you say pastry? I'm not really on the right page." She then complains that her screen has gone blank, saying it has "gone black like the night sky".
- 9 "If you are wasting our time, ma'am, you are going to lose your money because someone is trying to take your money and we are trying to upgrade your security," says the scammer.
- 10 She says: "I see a triangle icon, but I'm not sure if it's the right one. It could be a slice of pie. You know, my eyesight isn't what it used to be."
- 11 "Do you have any lovely pastries in your area? I do adore a good scone," she adds.
- 12 Behind this is an AI system which has been trained on real scam calls, said Virgin Media O2's marketing director, Simon Valcarcel. It has been trained to keep the scammers online and waste their time.
- 13 The company worked with Jim Browning, who posts videos of himself wasting criminals' time. They put phone numbers on websites where scammers were likely to find them. They included sites with prizes that are "too good to be true".
- 14 After a few days, the scam calls started coming in. The results were then recorded on a laptop.
- 15 Over a few weeks, Daisy wasted each scammer's time for up to 40 minutes when they could have been scamming real people.
- 16 Rather than using it on a much wider scale, however, Valcarcel said the project was aimed at raising awareness. Some of the scammers guessed they were talking to an AI bot, but future versions could use many different types of accent and persona for Daisy.
- 17 Many scammers work in call centres, and if one has no luck, their details will go to another, according to findings from the project. In one case, Daisy was passed between four different callers.
- 18 Artificial intelligence is being used to fight fraud in many industries, such as banking and travel, according to Serpil Hall at Celebrus, a technology firm that deals with fraud and scams.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Who is Daisy?
2. What does Daisy do?
3. What type of persona does Daisy use?
4. What are two ways Daisy delays scammers during phone calls?
5. How long can Daisy keep scammers on the phone?
6. What company created Daisy?
7. What happens when one scammer fails to get information from Daisy?
8. What was the main purpose of the Daisy project, according to Valcarcel?
9. How many different callers contacted Daisy in one instance?
10. Who is Jim Browning, and what is his role in this project?

4 Key language

a. Underline the subordinating clause in the sentences below. Circle the conjunction.

1. Because she asks about whether they like tea, the criminals end up furious rather than successful.
2. Because she's confused about how computers work and is eager to talk about her younger days, Daisy can frustrate the scammers on the other end of the line.
3. He waits while she looks for her glasses.
4. Daisy wasted each scammer's time for up to 40 minutes when they could have been scamming real people.

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b. Change the order of the two clauses in each sentence in the previous activity and rewrite them.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- Spam and phishing emails are usually easy to spot.
- Checking your accounts regularly is a good way to be sure you don't become a victim of fraud.
- Using the same password on many websites is just so much easier to remember.

6 In your own words

a. Do some research about how to protect yourself and your loved ones against fraud. Answer these questions.

- What are some ways that scammers try to harm people?
- How can people protect themselves and their loved ones?
- How can AI help fight this problem?
- What are some things to do if you, or someone you love, have been scammed?

b. Report your findings to the class and share the information you learned, as well as your opinions. Include facts and statistics that support your research. Give reasons to support your answers.