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LIFESTYLE CAREERS

New Job Scams Are Flourishing. Young Workers Are Especially Susceptible.

Fake recruiters using sophisticated techniques lure in college students and new graduates

By [Ray A. Smith](#) [Follow](#)

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New college graduates eager to get their first professional job are becoming targets of a bolder and more personalized type of fraud.

Scammers are using information available online to claim a school dean or professor the student knows has recommended them for a job opening. In some cases, the scammers hack into a professor's emails or create similar addresses to pose as a faculty member urging the student to apply.

The goal is to get the student to apply for a job and then steal the college student's identity or bank information. On a smaller scale, the scammers might be trying to persuade the student to put up money for home-office equipment.

"It's something we've been seeing a lot more over the past year," said Kati Daffan, assistant director of the Federal Trade Commission's division that monitors schemes.

The FTC posted a warning earlier this month on its website about job scams that target students. The number of overall recruiting scams reached a peak last summer and has stayed elevated since then, according to the FTC.

Cody Querubin, a senior at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va., got an email in his student account in February about a data-analyst internship from an address that read careers@veollawatertech.com. There is a real company named Veolia Water Technologies & Solutions.

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Cody Querubin PHOTO: CODY QUERUBIN

When Querubin replied that he was interested, he was invited to interview in Microsoft Teams. The interview was conducted entirely by writing in the chat function with someone claiming to be a hiring manager. Looking back, Querubin said he realizes that was a red flag.

Soon after, Querubin was offered a remote job and sent a check to cover the cost of a laptop and software. Querubin said he deposited the check into his bank account. The next day,

he was told to send the money to a vendor through Apple Pay or Zelle.

He suspected something sketchy was going on and notified his bank, but by then it was too late. The check bounced and the money was gone. He had lost \$1,745.

He reported the scam to his bank, his university, local police and the FBI.

“I was really frustrated and just angry,” Querubin said.

Particularly susceptible

Students, soon-to-be graduates and recent college grads are especially vulnerable to scammers because of their comfort transacting so much of their lives online and their relative inexperience in the job market, according to watchdog-agency officials and career counselors.

The hustles are compounding an already-stressful season because the job market for soon-to-be college graduates is tougher than last year.

“They’re so thrilled that somebody reached out to them that maybe they’re not as guarded to double check to see if this is a real person,” said Beth Hendler-Grunt, president of Next Great Step, a career-coaching firm.



Jorge Robles PHOTO: JORGE ROBLES

February, he got an offer to interview for a remote junior web-developer role at Antech Systems. But the email address appeared to come from a newly bought domain.

“I still gave it a chance because at that point I hadn’t really heard much from other people,” he said.

Robles answered programming questions in a document, shipped it back and was told via email that he had gotten the job. “It’s like, wait, I haven’t even spoken to anyone. This is already, like, red flags everywhere,” he said.

He called Antech to confirm the offer and was told it was a hoax.

In an email to The Wall Street Journal, an Antech vice president said the company heard from four people who were contacted about a fake job opening. The company then reported the incidents to the FBI and worked with the domain registrar to have the domain taken offline.

Employers respond

Recruiting firm Murray Resources, in Houston, got at least 100 calls and emails and a negative review online in March about scam text messages received from people claiming to work there.

Keith Wolf, managing partner at the firm, promptly posted a warning on the company’s website.

“It’s been a little nuts,” he said.

language to its job postings after prospective applicants alerted the company that scammers were impersonating the electronic-games company, said Marco Carrillo, director of talent and diversity.

Job scammers are also using job boards and networking sites like Indeed, ZipRecruiter and LinkedIn, which has prompted those sites to update their fraud-detection efforts. LinkedIn this month launched a verification feature for recruiters, so job seekers can see a badge on their profiles to signal it is an authenticated corporate subscription.

Job seekers should be wary of texts or emails that ask them to do an interview in any app they need to download, such as Signal or WhatsApp, or requests to conduct interviews only by text, email or online chat, said Teresa Murray, consumer-watchdog director at U.S. Public Interest Research Group, an advocacy organization. Any question about personal information or bank-account numbers, and promises to send a check to cover work-from-home equipment are red flags, she said.

College students and new graduates should bounce communications off a parent, older sibling or trusted mentor.

“Younger folks may not know what’s a normal request and what smells fishy,” she said.

That is what Maggie Braswell did after receiving an email offering an internship as a digital-marketing and customer-relationship manager that she hadn’t applied for. She downloaded a messaging app called Session for a briefing on the role and training and thought she was texting with the recruiting team. Eventually, she was told she would have to supply her banking information to receive her first paycheck.

The senior at Elon University consulted her parents, who raised concerns and made calls to the company to help her figure out the people claiming to work for them were fake.

“I was, like, OK, I’m being catfished,” she said. “Thank God, I didn’t give them any personal information.”

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