

The Rise of the Pig Butcher

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The “pig butchering” scam is not new but has enjoyed a rapid rise in recent years. So much so, that virtually everyone reading this blog will have been an intended mark at some point, probably without knowing it. Indeed, if you have ever received a message from an unknown number with a random message that apparently wasn’t intended for you such as “sorry I missed my appointment” or “Hi mum, this is my new number” then that probably wasn’t an innocent mistake, it was the start of the long con of the 2020s.

The pig butcher scam generally starts online, through social media, or via text message, any way that the “butcher” can gain the trust of the “pig” without the need for actual personal contact. What will follow are many friendly messages designed to build a relationship before, at a certain point, the butcher will introduce a new, exciting investment opportunity, more often than not, in the crypto sphere.

Once the investment opportunity has been introduced, then comes the fattening of the pig. The butcher will often simulate sizeable gains in the initial investment and maybe even allow small withdrawals of funds by the pig in order to entice further, larger investments in a “one-time-only-once-in-a-lifetime opportunity”.

Once the larger investment has been made, if the pig tries to withdraw funds, they will be told that they need to pay taxes or fees to access it. Once the victim realises that the investment is fake, the funds and the perpetrators will be gone. The scam does not always end there though, if the butcher senses blood, it will continue to bleed the pig. The butcher may introduce the victim to recovery agents who have managed to secure the invested funds if only the victim would pay an additional fee for their release.

It is often organised crime gangs behind scams such as pig butchering and they will do all they can to put their ill-gotten gains beyond the reach of the victim. However, cryptocurrency is easier to trace than many realise given that every transaction has a unique identifier and is recorded on the blockchain. If the victim acts quickly, it may well be possible to follow the crypto and look to recover any funds that can be found on an exchange. The English Courts consider crypto assets to be property under English law, which means that a court is able to grant proprietary injunction orders in aid of tracing claims and freezing injunctions over misappropriated assets that can be located.

Of course, the only sure-fire way to avoid losing money to the pig butcher is to avoid becoming the

pig. This means being cautious of contacts that you do not properly know introducing investment opportunities and get-rich-quick scenarios that seem too good to be true. You should always do your research properly before investing, particularly as these scams will often involve downloading fake investment apps or navigating to URLs that are very similar to genuine financial institutions.

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National Law Review, Volumess XIII, Number 328

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