

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

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. What advice do you have about staying safe against online scams and frauds? Discuss in a group and choose the three best tips to share with your class.

1. Tip 1: Apps can block callers on a blacklist.
2. Tip 2: Be more on guard when you get an unknown call
3. Tip 3: Don't answer unknown callers/numbers

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.

scammer

affable

unauthorised

exasperated

persona

anomaly

tactic

fraudster

verify

ambivalence

bumbling

combat

dither

ubiquitous

riddled

1. A person who lies to someone to take money from them is called a(n) scammer or a(n) Fraudster.
2. To dither is to be indecisive or hesitant.
3. Something that is present, appearing or found everywhere is Ubiquitous.
4. If someone feels ambivalence, they have mixed or contradictory feelings about something.
5. Something full of or permeated with something unwanted is ~~abc~~ _____ with it.
6. Someone or something moving or acting in an awkward or confused manner is bumbling.
7. Someone who is intensely irritated and frustrated is exasperated.
8. Someone who is friendly, good-natured and easy to talk to is affable.

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

Level 3: Advanced

9. A planned way of doing something is a(n) tactic.
10. The way someone's character is presented to or perceived by others is their persona.
11. To combat something is to stop something unpleasant or harmful from happening or from getting worse.
12. If something is unauthorized, it does not have official permission or approval.
13. To verify something is to establish the truth, accuracy or validity of it.
14. A(n) anomaly is something that deviates from what is standard, normal or expected.

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

1. The VP's dithering over the decision cost the company valuable time.
2. The old building was riddled with structural problems.
3. Cameras have become ubiquitous; they're in smartphones, in doorbells and even in toys!
4. The fraudsters/scammers pretended to be bank employees to steal people's money.
5. The police work hard to combat crime in the city.
6. When you log in to your bank, you have to enter a security code to verify your identity.
7. The hacker triggered a security alert in the system because his access was unauthorized.
8. The new employee bumbled through his first presentation nervously.
9. The affable tour guide made everyone feel welcome and comfortable.
10. Her ambivalence about the job offer made it difficult to make a final decision.

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

Level 3: Advanced

Daisy's dithering frustrates phone fraudsters and wastes time they could be using to scam real people

Shane Hickey
04 February, 2025

- 1 An elderly grandmother who chats about knitting patterns, recipes for scones and the blackness of the night sky to anyone who will listen has become an unlikely tool in combatting scammers.
- 2 Like many people, "Daisy" receives countless calls from fraudsters, who often try to take control of her computer after claiming she has been hacked.
- 3 But because of her dithering and inquiries about whether they like cups of tea, the criminals end up furious and frustrated rather than successful.
- 4 Daisy is, of course, not a real grandmother but an AI bot created by computer scientists to combat fraud. Her task is simply to waste the time of the people who are trying to scam her.
- 5 O2 rolled out "AI granny" Daisy for a short period to show what could be done with artificial intelligence to counter the troublesome scammers who have become so ubiquitous.
- 6 Using a mixture of ambivalence, confusion about how computers work and an eagerness to tell stories about her younger days, the "78 years young" Daisy draws sighs and snapping from fraudsters on the other end of the line.
- 7 In one call O2 released, a scammer tries to take control of her computer after telling her it is riddled with viruses. He is kept on the line while she looks for her glasses and bumbles about trying to turn the machine on and find the Internet Explorer icon.
- 8 "You know, back in my day we didn't have all this technology. Everything was much simpler. What about you, dear?" she says. When 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."
- 9 Another call has a scammer again trying to take control of her computer, but Daisy delays by talking about how she usually just uses it for knitting patterns and recipes for scones. "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.
- 10 When a third scammer tries to get her to download the Google Play Store, 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".
- 11 "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 exasperated scammer.
- 12 When she tries to find the icon the scammer is asking her to press, 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. Let me just squint at it."
- 13 "Do you have any lovely pastries in your area? I do adore a good scone," she adds.
- 14 Behind the affable "hoping to" is an AI system which has been trained on real scam calls, said Virgin Media O2's marketing director, Simon Valcarcel.
- 15 "It knows exactly the tactics to look out for, exactly the type of information to give to keep the scammers online and waste time," he said.
- 16 The company worked with Jim Browning, a "scam baiter" who posts videos of himself wasting the time of criminals, to plant phone numbers on websites where they were likely to be found by fraudsters hoping to scam people. They included sites promoting competitions where the prizes appear "too good to be true".
- 17 They then waited for the scam calls to start coming in – and, sure enough, after a few days they did. The results were then recorded on a laptop.
- 18 Over a few weeks, Daisy wasted each fraudster's time for up to 40 minutes when they could otherwise have been scamming real people.
- 19 Rather than be rolled out on a much wider scale, however, Valcarcel said the project was aimed at raising awareness. Some of the scammers eventually guessed they were talking to an AI bot, but future versions could use many different types of accents and personas for Daisy.
- 20 Many fraudsters work in call centres, and if one has no luck in getting information from their victim, their details will be passed on to another, according to findings from the project. In one case, Daisy was passed between four different callers.

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

Level 3: Advanced

- 21 Artificial intelligence is being used to combat fraud across many industries now, according to Serpil Hall at Celebrus, a technology firm that deals with fraud and scams.
- 22 It is used in banking to identify unauthorised transactions and identity fraud, in insurance to verify claims, in travel to monitor unusual booking patterns and in public services to identify things such as anomalies in tax filings, she said.

© Guardian News and Media 2025
First published in *The Guardian*, 04/02/2025

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

Level 3: Advanced

3 Comprehension check

mnnn

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Who is Daisy and what is her purpose? **wasting scammer's time**
2. What type of persona does Daisy adopt in her conversations? **elderly grandmother**
3. How does Daisy typically delay scammers during phone calls? **by chatting about other things**
4. How long can Daisy keep scammers on the phone? **an average of 40 minutes**
5. What company created Daisy? **O2**
6. What happens when one scammer fails to get information from Daisy? **He pauses her on**
7. What was the main purpose of the Daisy project according to Valcarcel? **Raising awareness**
8. How many different callers contacted Daisy in one instance? **4**
9. Who is Jim Browning and what is his role in this project? **He is a scam baiter**
10. In what other industries is AI being used to combat fraud? **banking, insurance, public services**

4 Key language

a. Combine the sentences below using a defining relative clause with *who*.

1. a. An elderly grandmother has become an unlikely tool in combatting scammers.
b. This elderly grandmother chats about knitting patterns.
2. a. 'Daisy' receives countless calls from fraudsters.
b. These fraudsters try to take control of her computer after claiming she has been hacked.
3. a. Daisy's task is simply to waste the time of the people.
b. The people are trying to scam her.
4. a. The company worked with Jim Browning, a 'scam baiter'.
b. Jim Browning posts videos of himself wasting the time of criminals.

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

Level 3: Advanced

b. Write three personalised sentences using a defining relative clause with *who*.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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 isn't really a big deal.

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 common ways that scammers try to harm people?
- How can consumers protect themselves and their loved ones?
- How can AI help combat 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.