



FEATURE

Puppy Scams & Breeder Identity Theft

by Maria Arnold

Last year Australians lost over 3.5 million dollars to online pet scams as three intersecting threads of pandemic culture resulted in the perfect storm: a huge increase in demand for pets; lock downs, which prevented people from meeting breeders in person and relying on a third party to deliver their pet; and more fraud. Add to that the fact that the price of pets skyrocketed and scammers were looking for new and better ways to cash in. They needed to fool even the most cautious puppy buyers - those who might look for and check credentials – so breeder identity theft also hit new heights.

What the scammers learned during this time won't be unlearned, so whether you're a puppy buyer or a breeder, it's important to know how you can protect yourself, your money and your identity.

What is Breeder Identity Theft?

Breeder identity theft occurs when a scammer uses a breeder's details, information and/or photos to create fake online advertisements. They will:

- use Photoshop to adjust a photo of a registration card
- create an email address using the breeders prefix
- provide the breeder's phone number for verification purposes, and then elect not to display it
- and even build a near exact copy of a legitimate breeder's website and Facebook pages complete with photos, litter information, the breeders name and address, everything. Stolen, copied and up on a new website - complete with an online payment portal.

Scammers submit their ads to as many online platforms as they can, most of which are published without review.



Image: French Bulldogs are one of the top 3 breeds found in fake advertisements



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While the number and impact of scammers grew during COVID, they've been at it for a long time. Perfect Pets is an Australian owned and operated online pet directory that has had processes in place to screen out scammers since launching a decade ago. Fortunately, these processes stood up to COVID madness. The site lists Dogs Australia (ANKC) breeders and works closely with the Member Offices to ensure that new account applications are carefully verified. This is critical to ensuring the site remains secure and safe from scam activity and is part of an ongoing effort, because small changes in the online space can have a big impact, and fast.

Monitoring scam activity is critical and Perfect Pets has seen scammers moving into other parts of the pet industry. In the last six months fundraising scams, via fake veterinary websites, have started to appear. The Australian Veterinary Association have been made aware and are understandably alarmed. It's important we are all vigilant and use a combination of good old fashioned teamwork and cooperation as well as the best and latest technology to keep up.

Breeders Beware!

Breeders are also vulnerable beyond the online space as scammers may target them directly. One breeder was contacted by a prospective buyer who told her that she'd been scammed and felt she needed a photo of the breeder's driver's licence and registration to proceed with purchasing a puppy. The unsuspecting breeder emailed the photos through, and before long her information had been used in countless scams where her name, business and photos were used to trick people. Apparently many of them actually turned up at the breeder's house to collect their puppy, only to be told they'd been scammed and should contact the police.

Responsible Buyers

In the last 10 years Perfect Pets has put a lot of effort into trying to educate the general public about how important it is that they only buy from responsible, registered breeders. It's now evident that there's another message that we all need to get out there - ***Pet lovers need to become responsible buyers!***

There are a number of reasons that scammers succeed:

- People looking for pets are often impulsive and impatient – they want their pet now, or yesterday, and will often buy a puppy from wherever they can find one.
- People are prepared to pay very high prices for pets: \$10,000 - \$15,000 is not at all uncommon and typically for crossbred dogs from inexperienced, unregistered breeders, where there's been no health testing or other measures to ensure the well being of the puppy. Paying these prices just encourages greedy and unscrupulous people to get involved and cash in. Puppies listed on Perfect Pets average from \$2000 - \$5000 and this is for a well bred, fully health tested pedigree puppy from fully registered ANKC breeder.
- People aren't taking advice and making sure that the 'breeder' they are talking to is a legitimate breeder, let alone registered and responsible.

What to do if your details have been used by a scammer?

Perfect Pets always lets breeders know if accounts applications are submitted that are fraudulent and have used their details, and to date not a single scammer has had an account approved. While we're happy with that record, we do know that if scammers are submitting fake ads to us, they're usually posting them on other online sites that don't verify credentials. We always send breeders the details that have been submitted and then they are in a position to take all/ any of the following steps:

- Call the scammer and pretend to be enquiring about a puppy. They usually want email communication only, but sometimes they will answer the phone. Get as much information as you can, where are they (ask if you can visit), do they need a deposit (they will), so organise to get the bank account details, and importantly, work out if they are here in Australia. A lot of the scammers are from overseas, but there's a lot of Australian scammers too. If they are in Australia, you should contact your local police. In our experience you can be lucky, or unlucky, with the amount of help you get, but it's always worth reporting. From our side we can, and have, picked up location information from our website and shared it with the police to help track down scammers.
- Send a cease and desist email. Also inform them that you've notified authorities with all of their details, including their location (determined from their activity on the internet).



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- Check other sites that run pet ads. See if you can find ads for your prefix and breed. Not many are thorough with verification, some do no checks at all. If you find that your details are being used, contact the website and ask them to remove it immediately, and let them know that the police have been informed.
- If you have an online presence, let people know where you do and don't advertise. Some of the breeders on our site have a message saying: "we only advertise on perfect pets and dogsonline," others go into more detail, for example....

"Please note: We do not advertise on other platforms. If you see advertisements elsewhere using our photos, description, our registered prefix, or our breeder registration number, you are probably looking at potential imposters and scammers. If you have seen anything like this please contact us via Perfect Pets to ensure you are contacting us and not scammers."

Any breeders who'd like another avenue to connect with pet lovers that is secure, and exclusively Dogs Australia Breeders can join here: <https://www.perfectpets.com.au/user/register/registerAccount> or contact: maria@perfectpets.com.au for more information.

PerfectPets
The Ethical Pet Directory

Are you a Qantas Club Corporate member?

If you have an individual membership, why not join the DOGS NSW Corporate Qantas Club and save?

You do not have to rejoin, just fill in the application form using the corporate membership scheme.

You will roll over to the corporate rates upon your next renewal. Conditions apply.

Not a Qantas Club member, but would like to become one?

Join through DOGS NSW to take advantage of the corporate rates rather than pay the individual rates.

Benefits include:

- Access to the Qantas Club lounge at all airports you are travelling to or from.
- Guest passes into the lounge for a friend or family member, even if they are not travelling.
- Complimentary Frequent Flyer membership
- On-departure upgrades
- Priority reservations and wait listing
- Dedicated check-in
- Priority baggage and handling allowances
- Personalised service



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FROM THE CROWDS
NEXT TIME
YOU TRAVEL.....
HEAD TO THE
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LOUNGE!

For more information: contact Kerry Christofi on (02) 9834 0217 or email kchristofi@dogsnsw.org.au
Please provide your DOGS NSW membership number