

Artificial intelligence

by BRIAN LOCKHART

?Hello, Grandma? It's me Joey. I've been arrested. I need your help.?

You've probably heard of the grandparent scam, where an older person receives a telephone call from their supposed grandson, claiming he's been arrested and needs money for bail.

It is surprising how many people fall for this and send some money to an unknown location to secure the release of the grandchild.

You would think that a grandmother or grandfather would be able to tell that is not their grandson on the phone. I'm sure lots of people have said, ?You're not my grandson,? and simply hung up the phone.

However, many have fallen for it.

The scam relies on two things.

The person calling usually acts very distressed, maybe even crying so their voice is very distorted from when they would be calling in a normal voice. Secondly, the grandparent, thinking their grandchild is in serious trouble, wants to do whatever they can to help. Usually, the caller insists it be done right away or they are going to be taken away or held in jail. The gullible grandparent, frazzled by the news, makes the deposit before calling anyone to verify the story.

What if you got a call from your grandson and he was speaking in a rational voice, and you recognized him right away because you speak to him the phone on a regular basis?

Would that be more convincing that he needed your help?

The concept of artificial intelligence has existed for quite some time. The idea of an artificial being with intelligence has been around since people started telling stories, however a more realistic version of what could actually happen started in the mid 20th century.

For many people, at that time, artificial intelligence seemed to be something along the lines of a robot. See Isaac Asimov on that.

It was assumed that in the future, which is actually now, having a robot butler or maid to do the housework and drive you around town as a chauffeur would be common place. Just look back at some of the old Twilight Zone episodes of the 50s and early 60s, where the story was set way in the future - in the 90s - and robots in many forms were common place.

The old TV show, Lost in Space, which premiered in 1965, and is probably in re-runs somewhere, was set in the futuristic world of 1997, with a flying saucer, and a robot who had a mind of his own ? ?Danger Will Robinson, Danger!?

While they got it all wrong, Artificial Intelligence is actually here ? it just doesn't walk around the house, at least not yet.

Technology based on AI has seen a dramatic increase in capability, accessibility, and widespread use in recent years which in many ways is a good thing, but there is a darker side to what it can do.

Whenever something good happens, or new technology arrives, the criminal element will try to use it to their advantage, and that now includes high-tech criminals using AI to separate people from their money.

You have already probably received a notification from your bank asking you to verify your password or something else related to your account. Many of the notifications are very convincing, but all fake.

If you click on the link and verify your account information, you've just provided some criminal with your bank account number and password.

It is estimated that there are 3.4 billion of these messages sent worldwide every day. Even if a very tiny percentage of people fall for them, that is still a huge number.

Even something as simple as a criminal finding out the password to your e-mail could result in someone getting an urgent message from 'you' requesting assistance in some way.

Facial recognition systems are another scary type of AI that can track your movements and could possibly be used against you in different ways.

Another nefarious method of abusing AI is popping up, and that is the replication of voices.

Criminals can call a person on the phone, and by getting them to answer a few questions, they have a sample of a person's voice. AI can be used to replicate the voice.

The grandparents scam takes on an entirely new dynamic when you hear your grandson pleading for money in a voice you recognize.

Artificial Intelligence can provide some real benefits in a variety of ways, but at the same time, you have to remain vigilant to avoid ending up on the wrong side of it all.