

Seeing is believing. Eyewitness testimony. Pics or it didn't happen. All these phrases point to our natural inclination to be skeptical of things that we don't experience with our own senses. These phrases are sound advice, and their sentiment has served people well for thousands of years. However, the advent of artificial intelligence (or AI) has permanently altered the reliability of this advice.

AI has brought the problem of fictitious images and video to a new level. The AI of today has come a long way from the Max Headroom character of the 1980s. Gone are the days of the glitchy and pixilated images moving on the screen. Sophisticated AI can create truly astounding photographs of things that never happened, produce videos of events that are completely fictional, or create very realistic video and audio representations of anyone. Many people are concerned about how AI can harm our perception of what is real or deceive people into believing false claims surrounding weighty topics like world events or politics. This is only the leading edge of the concerns surrounding AI.

Criminals are always on the lookout for the next thing that will allow them to carry out their illegal activities and AI is an emerging trend in the world of financial scams. Using AI, scammers have tricked finance managers in select businesses to make money transfers to criminals using faked video calls that appear to be from the company CEO or others in positions of power. AI can be used to make falsified images or impersonate people's voices, allowing a criminal to expertly impersonate almost anyone. AI technology is in its infancy and its use in crimes remains rare today. However, as technology advances and AI becomes more difficult to detect, there seems little doubt criminals will begin to employ it with more frequency.

I've repeated the advice many times that you should never trust anyone who contacts you unexpectedly, regardless of who they might claim to be. The emergence of AI makes this advice more important than ever. Through AI, criminals will likely be able to create realistic sounding and appearing representations of your banker, your sheriff, or even your own family member. These copies can be made to say or do anything the person controlling the AI wishes. Protecting yourself in the age of AI means being your own best advocate and ensuring the contact you are receiving is from the person they claim to be. If someone contacts you unexpectedly, you need to be confident enough to tell the person that you will call them back after you've verified that they are who they claim to be. Determine who the person claims to be or represent by searching on your own for a telephone number and calling the number you found. Anyone who is legitimately contacting you should understand your diligence and allow you to call them back. An unwillingness to allow this is a big red flag.

Our world continues to become more complex each day with every new technological advancement. As technology both improves our lives and opens new vulnerabilities, you can continue to be on your guard by employing a healthy level of skepticism. Wait to act on any unexpected request until you've had the opportunity to do your homework to ensure the person contacting you is really who they say they are.

For more crime prevention information and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: <https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.