

# Red Flag 9

## Secret Marketing Tricks



The scammers have a lot of tools at their disposal. They spend hours, days, weeks, months, even years perfecting their craft. By the time you hear their pitch, it has already been tested and refined countless times. What you hear is the polished version, the slick script that works. That's why so many people fall for it — it sounds professional, it feels convincing, and it uses techniques most investors don't even realise are being deployed.

These marketing tricks are not accidental. They are designed, tested, and executed with precision. Let's go through some of the most common ones.

### **Anchoring of News Articles**

One of the smartest tricks is something called “anchoring.” This is where scammers attach their sales pitch to real, genuine news.

Here's how it works. Say, for example, that in July 2025 there's a big announcement that India will reduce its import tariffs on Scotch whisky. That's a huge headline for the whisky industry. Genuine news.

The scammer seizes the opportunity. They'll phone their clients or prospects and say: “Now is the perfect time to invest. Look at this announcement! Demand for Scottish whisky is about to skyrocket, and prices will follow. If you invest today, you'll be ahead of the curve.”

The investor Googles the announcement, finds it's true, and feels reassured. After all, if the news is real, the broker must be legitimate too, right? Wrong.

This is the brilliance of anchoring. The news is genuine, but the link to the investment is false. The investor subconsciously transfers the trust they have in the news to the scammer delivering it. In psychology, this is called “transfer of authority.” Suddenly, the broker looks credible because they're the messenger of truth — even though the conclusion they draw is entirely fabricated.

## **Paid Celebrity Endorsements**

The next trick is the use of celebrities. Not A-list global stars, but Z-list names. The sort of celebrities you half-recognise — maybe an ex-footballer, an actor from years ago, or a reality TV contestant.

Sometimes these celebrities know what they're doing. They're paid a fee, and they don't care whether the product is genuine or a scam. Other times, they're just careless. They don't research properly, they think it's a harmless endorsement, and they put their name to something dodgy.

Social media has turbocharged this. Influencers with 50,000, 100,000, or even a million followers can be paid to push these investments. They'll film themselves praising the product, maybe even pretending to invest themselves. But remember — they're not doing it because they believe in it. They're doing it because they're paid. It's self-interest, pure and simple.

The scammer knows that trust in celebrities is irrational but powerful. If you liked that footballer or followed that influencer, your guard drops when they endorse something.

## **Fake Awards**

Awards are another favourite.

When I ran my own FCA-regulated firm in the City of London for 16 years, I lost count of the times I was approached to “sponsor” an award. These were black-tie gala dinners in prestigious London hotels. The formula was simple: whoever paid the most for a table, or for the sponsorship package, won the award.

Everyone in the industry knew it. The awards weren't about performance or merit — they were about money.

If that's how it works in the regulated space, just imagine what happens in the unregulated world of whisky or wine. Anyone can set up an award company. Anyone can design a shiny logo that says “Best Whisky Investment Company 2024” and plaster it on their marketing.

Awards are not regulated. They are meaningless. But in a glossy brochure, they look impressive. The investor sees “award-winning” and feels reassured, when in reality the award could have been bought for a few thousand pounds.

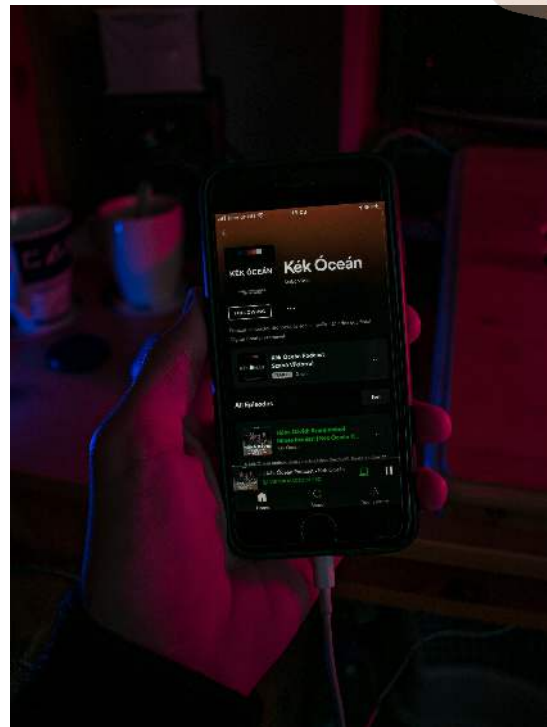
### **Employee and Friend Reviews**

Then we come to reviews.

Go to Trustpilot, Google, or Feefo, and you’ll see pages of glowing five-star reviews. But how many are genuine? How many are written by real clients, and how many are from employees, friends, or even paid reviewers?

It’s not difficult to fake reviews. There are entire markets for this. In countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines, or even parts of Africa and South America, you can pay people to set up accounts and leave positive reviews. Some are bots, others are real people running dozens of fake profiles.

You can even buy “review packages” — 50 reviews for £100, 200 reviews for £300, and so on. That’s why a brand-new company can suddenly appear with hundreds of “Excellent” ratings.



The only reviews you can really trust are the one-star reviews. Because no scammer is going to post a bad review of themselves. In fact, the one-star reviews often tell the truth. Look closely, and you’ll see patterns: people reporting the same problems, the same high-pressure sales tactics, the same inability to withdraw money.

Even more revealing is how the company responds to bad reviews.

Often, you'll see them trying to discredit the reviewer, accuse them of lying, or even bribe them to take the review down.

That behaviour tells you everything you need to know.

And if the reviews are only hosted on the company's own website?

Forget it. Those are worthless.



## **Dodgy Research Analysts**

Another marketing trick is the use of “independent” research analysts.

These analysts claim to be separate, objective voices. They publish articles, blogs, and research notes praising the asset in question — whether that's whisky casks, gold coins, fine art, or some new IPO.

But here's the truth: many of these analysts are paid directly by the scammers. Their job is not to be independent. Their job is to create the illusion of credibility. They write glowing reports, stuff them with jargon and graphs, and make them sound official. Then the scammers push those reports up the Google search rankings through SEO tricks, so when an investor searches “Is whisky cask investment safe?”, they find the very article designed to manipulate them.

The investor thinks: “Look, even this analyst says it's a good idea.” But the analyst is nothing more than a hired mouthpiece.



## **Why These Tricks Work**

The real danger of these secret marketing tricks is that they work on trust.

- News anchoring works because people trust the news.
- Celebrity endorsements work because people trust familiar faces.
- Awards work because people trust symbols of recognition.
- Reviews work because people trust the experiences of others.
- Analysts work because people trust expertise.

The scammer doesn't have to invent these sources of trust. They just have to hijack them. And once your brain makes the connection, it's very hard to shake off.

## **How to Protect Yourself**

### **So how do you fight back?**

1. **Be sceptical of timing.** If a broker suddenly calls after a news event, ask yourself: why is this news relevant to me investing today? Usually, it isn't.
2. **Ignore celebrities.** If someone you recognise is endorsing an investment, assume they were paid. Do your own research.
3. **Question awards.** Look into who gave the award. If you can't trace the awarding body, it's worthless.
4. **Scrutinise reviews.** Pay attention to the negative ones. They're often the most genuine.
5. **Verify analysts.** Check their background. Are they really independent, or do they have links to the very company being promoted?

## Conclusion

Scammers are professional marketers. They know how to exploit psychology, trust, and emotion. By the time you see their pitch, it's already been polished to perfection.



Remember this: if a marketing campaign feels too slick, too perfect, too full of glowing endorsements and awards — that's the biggest red flag of all.

Genuine investments don't need to rely on secret tricks.

They stand on their own merits. Scams, on the other hand, are built on smoke and mirrors.

Once you learn to see through the tricks, you'll never fall for them again.

# Red Flag 9 ...

In "Red Flag 9: Secret Marketing Tricks," discover the cunning techniques scammers use to manipulate investors, from anchoring their pitches to real news to leveraging celebrity endorsements. Learn how fake awards and phony reviews create an illusion of credibility, hiding the truth behind their deceptive practices. Arm yourself with the knowledge to recognize these red flags and protect your investments from the slickest marketing tricks in the game.

