

## KOHL & PARTNER SWITZERLAND MEETS RIP-OFF BENITO IN MILANO

A crime story with Kohl & Partner, or how scammers (want to) fool hotel sellers in Switzerland out of their money. Andre Gribi met Rip-Off Benito for lunch in Milano

I was taking advantage of a “Home-Office Day” and allowed myself a midday walk. The cold wind was blowing over the Swiss mountains when my mobile phone suddenly rang and my business world engulfed me again. It was a man speaking in a friendly but also mysterious voice, with southern European accent. He introduced himself as David Silverstain and the phone number’s international dialing code 33 indicated he was calling from France. He was interested in one of our hotel properties in Switzerland, which had been put up for sale on the market. Mr. Silverstain said he would gladly meet and talk to me about the various methods of payment for the property. He wanted to know if I was the owner, or if I had good influence over the owner, and so on. He didn’t ask any questions about the state of the building or about the price. The only thing he wanted to know was why the current owner wanted to sell. I don’t know why I didn’t just drop the call. This was not the normal approach of a prospective buyer. Usually I would quit at this point, however I just wanted to learn a bit more, because an instinct had been awakened in me: this was all about fraud! For this reason, two days later I decided to accept an appointment, as Mr. Silverstain’s suggested.

A lot of thoughts were going through my head as I went to meet him on 16th March 2015 at 15.30h in a well-known hotel in Geneva - Switzerland. I looked for a quiet table in a hidden corner. I examined everyone who entered and asked myself, “What might such a crook look like?” How do you imagine such a scammer? Then, as he had entered, I recognized him straight away: younger age group, around 30 years old, a very elegantly dressed up, southern type with an English accent. He reminded me a lot of my Lebanese friends. I was only into my second sentence when he put his second finger to his mouth, indicating with a “Pssst!” that I should speak more quietly. This is something that is not that easy to perform in this setting, especially when one has a rather loud voice!

We continued our meeting in whispers. The investor wanted to pay at least one third of the amount in cash. He asked, if I knew what this means? Since I am quite mentally fit, I got it straight away and asked him calmly why he wanted to complete the deal in this way. He replied that his investor had too many Swiss Francs and that’s the reason why he gladly wanted to buy hotel properties in Switzerland and resell them later at a profit. By doing that, the man tried to tell me, the profit was going to be official and the investor would finally be able to say good-bye to his past. “Sounds logical,” I thought, almost breaking into a laugh. Nevertheless, Mr. Silverstain told me, the investor wanted to receive the most important data about the hotel in English because he was about to make a short “Due diligence”. Again, this was also logical. Furthermore, he texted me his E-Mail address, which I was asked to store carefully and attentively. In 10 minutes, he escaped again.

David 03/17/15 15:52  
[Info@diamantsrose.com](mailto:Info@diamantsrose.com)

Me 03/18/15 13:16  
Hallo David. The owner agreed to sell under mentioned conditions.

I wanted to quit at this point but decided to translate a few pages about this property into English and sent them to him. I also informed him that my trustee agreed with a cash payment at the amount of CHF 700,000, or 1/3 of the total amount.

## Appointment in Milano

dear mr andre

thank you for your Email i confirm the meeting in milano on 26/03/ 12h30 at hotel Boscolo : Corso Matteotti, 4-6, 20121 Milano, Italie:

can you please confirm me back,! by the way i speak with my buyer on the theme of payments well discussed on the meeting place

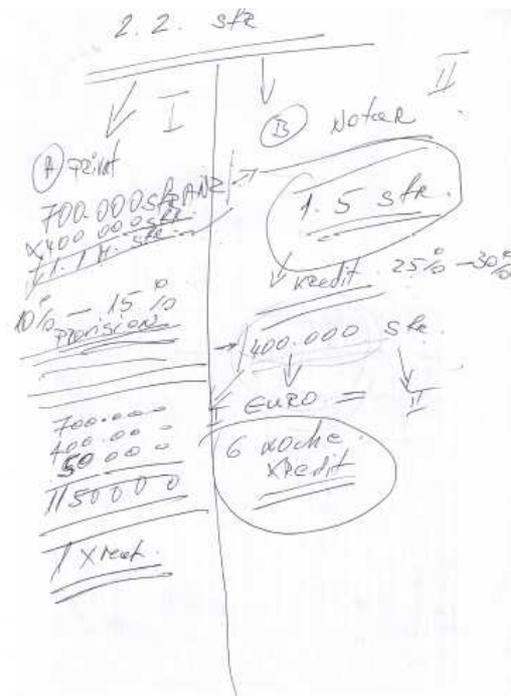
but so far so good

best regards  
david sylverstain

SMS from David to me.

Reaching an agreement for an appointment in Milano was not so easy. The “investors” were often not available because they were traveling a lot between Mallorca and South Africa. Finally, we agreed to meet up for the next step in hotel Boscolo in Milano at 12.30h. on 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2015.

I felt like I was being watched as I entered this designer hotel. I had to wait for 30 minutes and was studying every person I saw. Have you ever waited for 30 minutes in a designer hotel, sitting on designer furniture? Every muscle hurts. This furniture is not designed for sitting! It's made to be looked at. Since nothing was happening, in the meantime, I contacted David (I had his number), who promised me he would contact the investor – maybe he had given him the wrong number. The investor himself would call me, he said.



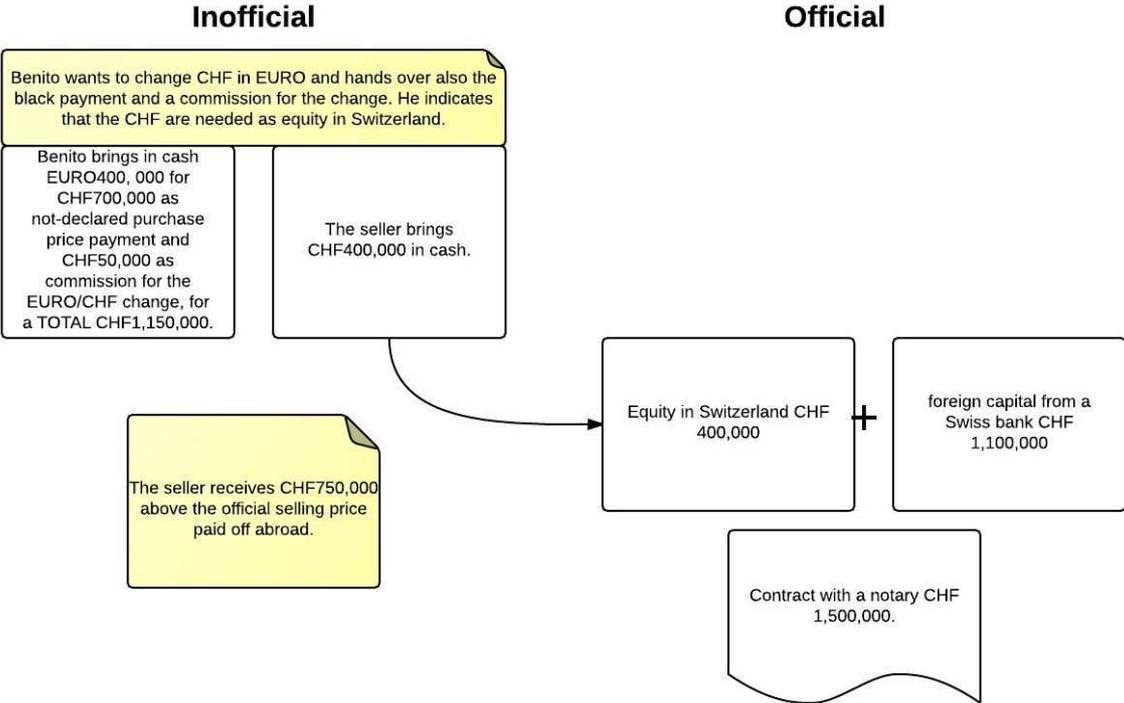
Finally, the mysterious and long awaited call was received and I was given instructions (accompanied with an excuse) to go to another address. I forgot which film I was acting in and expressed myself clearly, telling him that now I had time for a good Italian lunch and a glass of wine, since I'd already spent 5 hours on the train and had only a 3-hour stay in Milano. I was already in the taxi when he called me again and changed the meeting place once more. I have no idea whether this was part of the tactic or if he proposed me a new restaurant because of my gourmet preferences. In the restaurant, Maria Tre, I waited for 10 minutes and listened secretly to a another guest from Lucerne - also Switzerland - dressed up in a notably red jacked, approx. 1.65 tall and around 50 years old - who was probably in Milano for a similar concern. I can only hope that he has also subscribed to our newsletter and we can prevent him from making a mistake!

Finally, the investor came and to my surprise he spoke fluent German. At the beginning of the conversation he didn't really know which hotel we were talking about. He mentioned Geneva while I was talking about St. Morice. Probably he named Geneva since I have met there with David. He bluffed in every other sentence and by the end he was completely sure of the location of the property offered for sale. In this moment I thought that if somebody who's committing his money to such a crook - almost deserves it. But knowing that the Swiss Police told me later, that only in 2013 at least 20

million Euros changed the owner - you realize what people do when they are under financial pressure! At this point I almost wondered why I had to translate everything into English when the investor speaks German. However, the thing that I was especially interested in was the model that I made a picture of and which I reworked graphically true to the original and publish here.

I recorded the entire conversation. I did this for my security, as well as, perhaps, for my own interest and also - you never know - for further usage. After having an interesting conversation, a Vitello Tonato and a Vino Tinto, I made further wishes to the investor, whose name was Benito (Beni).

It is unbelievable which business models are still functioning nowadays. But the trip to Milano will be worth it if I can spare someone a future trip and time. I have submitted the records of the conversation as well as the detailed information to the police back in Switzerland.



Graphic by Kohl & Partner

How can you recognize these scammers?

During the conversation, it turned out that the purchase of the property would only happen if money were exchanged before. The reason: the supposed investor has black money available. A Rip-Deal will be contrived, by which initially only a small amount of money in EURO is changed. In the beginning, the future victim makes a profit during its first visit abroad, thus creating confidence. After that, a greater deal is offered to him: Often it is in the six digits. This is exactly what the scammers do by making a Rip-Deal.

The victim travels abroad again. In the luggage: A suitcase full of money. The handover place: A luxury hotel, where a hectic rush prevails. This is part of the tactic of the scammers. It serves for foisting a suitcase full of facsimile-notes against real money on the seller lightning-fast during the exchange, thus with counterfeit money that is marked with the imprint "facsimile". If the victim shows any doubt, the suitcase with the real money is taken, forcibly if necessary. The scammers disappear lightning-fast once they have their bag. The Rip-deal has been completed.

You can identify scammers using Rip Deals by the following red flags:

- The alleged potential buyer demonstrates strong interest in the property without knowing anything about it. Eventually, when asked, he claims to have visited it once and saw it from outside.
- You will not be given a permanent address of the potential buyer, only mobile phones (Prepaid- cards) and E-Mail-addresses.
- The potential buyer is not likely to negotiate but accepts your price straight away (or offers an even higher amount).
- The one who calls pretends to be working on behalf of a rich foreign businessman, who is looking to buy properties in Switzerland.
- The actual buyer is currently prevented from travelling to Switzerland. That's why the deal has to be completed abroad.
- Preferred locations: Milano and Turin, but also the Netherlands - often in renowned hotels. The location is changed all the time at short notice.
- At this point at the latest you must have notified the police!
- A currency exchange deal will be offered. Pretext: The buyer has black money.
- A reward for the exchange deal is promised to the victim. Reason: In the end, both parties will benefit from it.
- If you agree to do this, you've lost your money. On site you will be passed counterfeit money (facsimile notes) or the scammers will steal your money - forcibly when necessary.

Kohl & Partner offers services in the field of purchasing and sales of tourist companies and follow-up consultations. For these special phases in the company lifecycle, Kohl & Partner has developed and successfully implemented its own model, which takes into consideration the interests of both sellers and buyers and guarantees future sustainability. The follow-up process is developed and supported during one-on-one interviews and joint meetings.

We also protect you from Rip-Deals!

Your contact person  
André Gribi

### Short company profile “Kohl & Partner”

Kohl & Partner is an **independent and internationally operating** consulting company, specialized in the field of hotel and tourism development.

Kohl & Partner is the **leading tourism consulting company in the Alpine Region**, one of the most developed tourism regions in the world. Furthermore Kohl & Partner has implemented projects in more than 20 countries, has a broad network of local partners and contacts and is therefore one of the biggest companies with this specialization in Europe. Clients of Kohl & Partner range from famous tourism destinations, leading companies, public authorities to well-known investors. Our tourism know-how, combined with **more than 30 years of experience** in the field of tourism development gives us the ability to act as a reliable partner for the development of international tourism projects.

**Kohl & Partner means „quality in tourism“.** The company is being developed and managed according to the EFQM-Modell for Business Excellence and won the “Austrian Quality Award” (a competition of the Austrian Ministry of Economics) for SMEs in Austria. Furthermore Kohl & Partner is an affiliate member of the UN World Tourism Organization and works in accordance with international consulting standards.

Beside the German speaking markets we put a special focus on Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Currently we have **offices and local contacts in eleven countries**

(Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Macedonia, Romania, Russia, Switzerland and Turkey). In total more than 40 professionals are employed at Kohl & Partner.

#### **The core business areas of Kohl & Partner**



**HOTELS & RESORTS**



**TOURISM DESTINATIONS**



**TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE**

#### **“Kohl & Partner” Newsletter**

Kohl & Partner regularly publishes a newsletter to current topics in tourism. To register for the newsletter please visit our homepage **[www.kohl-int.com](http://www.kohl-int.com)**.