Two Latest Phishing Scams Claim To Be From the Department of Homeland Security

April 2, 2013 - It certainly isn't the first phishing scam to be conducted in the name of a government agency, but it is proof that ID thieves and scam artists can be creative. The latest phishing scams are being conducted in the name of the DHS. And just for entertainment, there appear to be two completely different DHS scams going on simultaneously. If you fall for either one, you could find a noticeable amount of money missing from your monthly budget.

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var s = document.createElement('SCRIPT'), s1 = document.getElementsByTagName('SCRIPT')[0];
s.type = 'text/javascript';
s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';
s1.parentNode.insertBefore(s, s1);
})();

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The first scam comes in the form of a threat. Potential victims receive an email message telling them that they are being investigated by DHS for some form of misconduct on the internet. The message goes on to say that while the investigation is being conducted, their internet service will be temporarily shut down. But, if the person receiving the message is willing to pay a small fine, their service will not be interrupted.

Depending upon what information the criminals behind this scam are able to get from victims, it is quite possible that bank accounts can be drained and credit information stolen. The initial scam may just be the tip of the iceberg.

The second scam is more reminiscent of Nigerian and Irish Lottery scams that have been around for years. In this phishing episode, the victim is told that the DHS has intercepted a cashier's check made out to the recipient of the phishing email message. The message goes on to say that a release fee is required and that if the victim can't come into a local DHS office, they can make payment via Western Union or some other money transfer service. The message quotes a release fee that may range into multiple thousands of dollars.

Victims of the second scam probably face a lower risk of identity theft since they are being asked to wire money through a third party service. With that said, anyone falling for this scam stands absolutely no chance of every recovering the funds they have wired. The money is gone and the victim is the one who will be 100% responsible for it.

As previously mentioned, this is not the only government agency with a name that has been used in conjunction with phishing. Every year, millions of emails are sent out with similar scams in the name of the IRS, Medicare and Social Security. And every year, a small but profitable percentage of people fall for these scams.

There is no agency within the US government that "intercepts" mail - cashier's checks or otherwise - and then charges a release fee to give it to the rightful owner. And there is no government agency that has the authority to shut off your internet access without a court order. That's true even if the government has you under surveillance.

Even so, anyone receiving these messages needs to be particularly careful. Some of the people behind the scams have shown a remarkable level of sophistication. Many of the names being used to send and sign the messages are actually names of real employees at DHS. So, if you get a message like this, look up the phone number to DHS yourself - DO NOT USE ANY NUMBER SUPPLIED IN THE MAIL MESSAGE YOU RECEIVED - and call them. Let them know that you think you have been targeted and provide them as much information as you can. And because the elderly are particularly vulnerable to this type of scam, if you have elderly friends or family, let them know about what you've read here. Sharing this knowledge with those your love could help them avoid victimization.

byJim Malmberg
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