

Phone scam targets Sask. residents with home computers

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Concern for their computers is making some Saskatchewan people fall victim to a phone scam.

The scam begins with an unsolicited phone call in which the caller claims to be from an official-sounding computer company, sometimes Microsoft. The caller says there are viruses in the household computer and offers to repair the problem through the Internet. If the victim agrees to follow the “repair” steps, it installs a virus that allows the caller remote access to the computer, where they can get the victim’s personal information. The caller also asks for the victim’s credit card information to “pay for the service.”

Since March 15, 50 Saskatchewan people have reported the scam to RCMP, and the scam has cost about \$1,500, with losses ranging from \$60 to \$349. Since January, the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre has heard over 3,200 complaints.

“When somebody says your computer’s at risk, then some people are thinking, ‘I’ve got to address this right now,’” said Cpl. Kelly Hall of the RCMP’s commercial crime unit in Regina.

John Weigelt of Microsoft Canada said while people might be savvy enough to ignore Internet popup warnings, the telephone “bridges that skepticism they would have online.”

The scam is targeting people across the country, including Reginan Jamie Rabbetz, who got his most recent call almost two weeks ago.

The two callers he spoke with were “persistent.” When he declined the most recent offer for “help,” saying he had to get back to his two children, the caller got huffy.

“I said to her politely, ‘I don’t think today’s the right time because I’m really busy with my baby,’ and she said, ‘What does your baby have to do with your computer?’”

Rabbetz said the caller ended up calling him a “moron” and hanging up the phone.

Matt Obrigewitsch got a call at home last week from someone from “computer support,” who didn’t give a company name.

“When I tried to ask him followup questions, because I work in computer support, it seemed like he couldn’t really answer,” said Obrigewitsch. “Very evasive, and then after about two or three questions he just hung up.”

Despite rumours the calls are coming from India, Hall suspects the operation is bigger than that and “it could be operating in Canada as well.”

To protect yourself from this phone scam, Hall advises to keep your virus software up to date, and be mindful of who is asking for personal information on the other end of your phone line.

Weigelt said Microsoft doesn’t contact people out of the blue.

“We allow people to reach out to us through customer support ... but we don’t reach out proactively in a cold-call type of scenario,” he said.

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