

E-Mail Lottery Scam Gets Attention from Department of Justice

August 3, 2011 – The US Department of Justice has gone to court and is seeking to freeze a number of overseas bank accounts used in an e-mail lottery scam. The good news is that the accounts actually still have money in them. Even better news, the victims may get most of their money back. But the current list of victims may only be the tip of the iceberg. And because the victims in this case appear to be mostly among the elderly, it is important for us all to understand how the scam worked and then to talk to friends and family that could potentially be targeted in similar scams.

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(function() {  
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);  
})();
```

In this particular investigation, the DOJ identified two victims who were solicited by e-mail. The mail messages they received claimed that they had won a lottery prize. Victims were asked to pay for fees and taxes associated with the prize. They were promised that once their deposits were made, the lottery money would be remitted to them.

The two victims already identified really got taken for a ride. One was an 80 year old resident of Washington State who paid the culprits close to \$900,000 after being promised a large prize. The other victim paid nearly \$500,000 after being told that he had won \$10 million from the Tourism Malaysia Lottery Program. That victim was 75 years old.

Both victims drained their personal bank accounts and used credit cards or loans to help pay the so-called fees and the first victim mentioned above actually refinanced his house.

The DOJ became aware of the scam when they gained access to the e-mail account of someone who was the target of a separate investigation. That e-mail account contained wire transfer receipts. Further investigation revealed that the two victims had made a combined 111 wire transfers totaling more than \$1.3 million.

The wire transfer records allowed the DOJ to identify a number of foreign bank accounts used in the scam. In total, those accounts still have roughly \$1.2 million in them.

This particular scam is typical of the phishing scams that are being run out of Nigeria. Given the amount of publicity surrounding these types of scams, it may surprise you to learn that people are still falling victim to this approach. In this particular case, at least one of the victims was a retired structural engineer. That just shows that a good education is not

necessarily enough to prevent victimization.

We've made these points countless times but we have to make them again. It is never a good idea to click on links in e-mail messages unless you know who the message is from. And under no circumstances should anyone wire money to people you don't know or who solicit you via e-mail.

If you have elderly relatives or friends who use the internet, take the time to sit down with them and talk to them about the dangers of being online. Some of the rules of thumb that everyone should follow when online include:

- Never give out your personal contact information to people you don't know personally. This information shouldn't be posted online either.
- Never give out your Social Security number when asked for it online or via the phone.
- Don't respond to e-mail messages from people you don't know. This includes clicking on links in messages.
- Never click on links in messages that appear to come from banks or financial institutions. These messages may be fake. If you receive an offer that you are interested in from a bank or brokerage firm, manually open your web browser and type in the internet address of the site you want to visit. The extra ten seconds that this takes could save you a lot of money and a tremendous amount of time.

by Jim Malmberg

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