

People with Professional Licenses Are Latest Target in Phishing Schemes

August 3, 2017 - There are a wide variety of jobs that require a professional license at the state or federal level. Contractors, brokers, realtors, lenders—the list goes on and on. Part of the licensing process normally requires the person holding the license to adhere to a specific code of ethics or to specific laws that govern behavior. Unfortunately, criminals are now using license information and ethics rules to target potential victims in phishing 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);
})();
```

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(function() {
var po = document.createElement('script'); po.type = 'text/javascript'; po.async = true;
po.src = 'https://apis.google.com/js/plusone.js';
var s = document.getElementsByTagName('script')[0]; s.parentNode.insertBefore(po, s);
})();
```

If you have a professional license of any kind, you don't have a lot of privacy. There are numerous websites run by local and state governments, as well as the federal government, which allow you to look up licensees. Depending upon the site, you can find information that includes full name, phone number, business address, email address, employer information and in some cases the home address of licensees. The idea is to provide as much information as possible to protect the public. But protecting the privacy of individual licensees isn't a priority. It isn't even a part of the equation.

Now the National Association of Realtors (NAR) is warning Realtors not to click on links in text of email messages, even if the message accuses the recipient of wrongdoing or ethics violations. According to REALTORMag, NAR's online magazine, "A broker recently received a text message claiming to be from the National Association of REALTORS® and accusing her of sending racist texts and emails. The text message demanded she pay a \$1,345 fine."

Fortunately for the broker involved, she didn't fall for the message. Instead, she reported it to NAR and they involved the FBI. But this scam isn't likely to be limited just to Realtors. Anyone with a professional license is a potential victim simply because their personal information is easily accessible.

The bottom line here is that if you have a professional license, you shouldn't be clicking on unknown links, even if the subject of the message makes you want to respond with some urgency. Instead, pick up the phone and call the supposed source of the message. If it is a legitimate message, they'll be able to tell you. And if it isn't, you'll be able to protect yourself.

Anyone who makes the mistake of clicking on a link like the ones described here should talk to an IT professional to make sure that their computer or cell phone hasn't become infected with a virus.

by Jim Malmberg

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