



News

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BBB Study: Sophisticated Scheme Helps Tech Support Scammers Bilk Millions from U.S. Victims

Rockford, Il., December 11, 2017 – A report by the Better Business Bureau (BBB) says it's not a matter of if you will become a target of computer technical support scammers, but when these scammers will try to victimize you. Thieves, most of whom are located in India, are using sophisticated advertising and carefully crafted sales techniques to scare consumers into buying phony fixes for their home and business computers. BBB warns consumers to remain on guard so they can combat these fraudsters.

The report – “**Pop-Ups and Impostors: A Better Business Bureau Study of the Growing Worldwide Problem of Tech Support Fraud**” (NOTE: The report is available on our “[Common Cent\\$](#)” Page) – says that anyone who owns or uses a computer is a potential target. Complaints about the fraud continue to mount as Microsoft, a software company whose name is routinely used by the scammers, reports it receives more than 12,000 complaints worldwide every month.

The report recommends a tougher, more-coordinated effort by U.S. law enforcement, including the filing of civil and criminal cases against the scammers. It urges law enforcement in India and other foreign countries where the scammers originate to make computer tech fraud a high priority. It also asks search engine companies to carefully vet, set strict standards and consider eliminating sponsored links for tech support firms that do not meet standards.

“In today’s age, it is paralyzing to stare at a blank computer screen or sit in front of a ‘frozen’ machine,” says Dennis Horton, director of the Rockford Regional Office of the Better Business Bureau. “Unfortunately, there are scammers operating who know exactly how to prey on those fears by promising fixes that don’t need to be made. These people aren’t interested in helping with computer problems. Their only interest is in stealing your money.”

A victim in Durand, IL says she fell for the scam, "I'm a retired nurse and my husband is a teacher yet we both got hooked".

Among the report's key findings:

- Consumers are lured into the scheme by four ways – by either a pop-up ad on their computer; an unsolicited phone call from a "technician" claiming to have detected problems with the user's computer; via ransomware attached to an email; or by Internet searches for technical support on sponsored links.
- Most people lose money through use of credit cards or debit cards (55 percent). Checks (36 percent) are the second most-common form of payment.
- The problem is worldwide with U.S. residents accounting for 33.6 percent of victims. The scam is also popular in Australia (25.4 percent of victims) and Singapore (22.4 percent).
- Studies show that 85.4 percent of the scammers come from India. Less than 10 percent of the scammers operate inside the U.S.
- According to the FBI, U.S. consumers lost more than \$21 million to the scheme in the first nine months of 2017.

The report was prepared by C. Steven Baker, BBB International Investigations Specialist. Baker is the retired director of the Federal Trade Commission's Midwest Region.

In his role with BBB, Baker is working with an alliance of five BBB's, including the Chicago/Rockford offices, in analyzing and reporting on some of the most pervasive fraud issues that impact American consumers. A study on puppy scams he authored and released in September was met with worldwide media coverage.

BBB offers the following tips for consumers to avoid being caught in tech support fraud:

- Research tech support companies before you decide to do business with them. Go to bbb.org to search for BBB Business Profiles or contact the Rockford BBB by calling 815.963.2222.
- Double-check all the details. If you're directed to an official company website, make sure that it's the real company's site by double-checking the spelling of the company's name in the website address. Anything that comes from "Micorsoft," for example, is a scam.
- If a caller claims to work for a reputable company, ask them to tell you their name or their employee ID, and in which department they work. Then look up and call that company's official customer service line and ask to be directed to that employee. Do not use a phone number provided to you by the caller.
- If your computer has been compromised, don't panic. You may still be able to get your machine fixed. Scammers are relying on you to make hasty decisions, you'll be better able to avoid their traps if you slow down and don't rush.
- Make sure you're using a quality, up-to-date antivirus software. Make sure you are running the latest version of the software.
- Change your passwords. First change the password to any account or machine the scammer has or could access. Then change the passwords on any account that you were logged into on your machine, as well as any accounts for which you use the same or very similar login credentials.

- Call your credit card company. If you made a payment by using your credit card, the company will help you to appeal any unauthorized charges and to get a new card.
- Victims can report it to BBB's ScamTracker.

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About BBB

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*Local victims available upon request.

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