

IRS Calls Phone Scam Blowing Up Our Phones

Judging by the number of complaints I receive, hundreds, if not thousands of folks in this area, are getting fake robo-calls from the IRS, threatening lawsuits, or arrest, and demanding the receiver immediately call back. Last week when I came to work on Monday morning, my voice mail held 25 phone messages, all of them reporting IRS scam phone calls. And by noon, I received six more calls on the same topic. When I came to work today, my voice mail held 16 messages, of which 14 reported the IRS phone call scam. Some folks called the "IRS" back, and found themselves speaking to a foreign-sounding man or woman, who demanded from \$600 to \$5000 as payment for back taxes, to be paid immediately, or face arrest and confiscation of property.

This is always a scam. The IRS does not make phone calls to contact taxpayers. Although the phone numbers these scammers use look like Washington DC, or other US numbers, the calls actually come from India. The best thing for us to do is ignore these messages. Don't call back, it is pointless. My advice is just not to engage with scammers, even when you know they are scammers.

The Better Business Bureau just listed their top ten scams of 2015, and this IRS scam was #1. An interesting point in their report was that Canadians are reporting the same scam in large numbers, with Canadians getting fake calls from their tax agency, the Canada Revenue Agency. I plan to write more on the top ten scams in my next column.

I am interested in the numbers these callers give you, as I turn them into the real IRS and the Federal Trade Commission. But it may take me a few days to return your calls.

MORE PHONE PHISHING

Several callers reported receiving robo-calls telling them their Bank of America debit card was "locked out". To unlock the account, the message told them to enter their sixteen-digit account number in the phone keypad. No one I talked to even maintained a Bank of America account, so it does not seem this phishing attempt was well-targeted. But this kind of phishing is not uncommon, and often does involve local banks. I spoke last week in Oxford Junction, Iowa, and learned the local patrons there of Citizens State Bank in Wyoming, Iowa experienced the same thing.

Along these same phishing lines, a Clinton woman reported a robo-call which informed her “your payday loan application is approved, please call back to accept the loan.” Well, she never applied for a payday loan, or any other kind of loan. This is a ruse designed to get return calls, so these crooks can engage you and wheedle some personal information from you. I give the same advice as with the IRS scam – ignore the call.

IN THE COURTS

The Iowa Attorney General announced a couple of actions in the last couple of weeks which interested me. First, on November 20, he announced an agreement with a Utah-based door-to-door satellite TV sales company, Clear Satellite, which allowed anyone who ordered DIRECT TV from them to cancel upon request. Although Clear Satellite denied it, they hit up consumers in door to door sales encounters, and did not inform them of their right to cancel within three days. Or if they did want to cancel, Clear Satellite refused them.

In September, I fielded several complaints from folks who got visits from a high-pressure cable TV salesman. Remember, any time you buy something from a door to door sales representative, that sales person must give you a “notice of cancellation” on a separate document, spelling out your rights to cancel an agreement within three days.

The second item of interest from the attorney general was his announcement of an agreement with the Tennessee Buying Club, which enrolled Iowa citizens in SavingsGalore.com. Most of these buying clubs rate a pretty close look anyway, but this one charged for memberships, which apparently it did not advertise when consumers signed up. This company did not get too many customers, a little more than 200, and agreed to refund their money, \$20,000, but it illustrates the pitfalls of signing on to one of these outfits without really checking it out. One of the “read the fine print” warnings the attorney general provided stated that by agreeing to free shipping or some other extra benefit with these companies, you might end up enrolling yourself in some club which will charge your bank account or credit card every month.

CONTACT SENIORS VS. CRIME

Let me know about scams, fraud, or other crookedness you run across. Most of what I learn, I learn from you. Contact me at Seniors vs. Crime, Clinton

County Sheriff's Office, 563-242-9211 extension 4433, or email me at randymeier@gapa911.us

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