

## THE END OF IRS PHONE SCAMS?

When you read this column, most of you expect to see what kinds of fraud and scams folks encountered in the recent past, since the last time you read the column. You like to know what to watch out for and guard against. In this column, I'm going to turn that around a little, and report on what is NOT happening.

What I am not hearing of recently is the IRS phone scam. If you have a phone in this country, it's likely you know what I am talking about. You get a robo-call from a voice demanding you call the IRS immediately, or expect something unpleasant – like jail, lawsuit, etc. The message comes with a phone number to call. Those who returned the call reported talking to men and women with South Asian accents, who made threats of jail if they did not get paid for tax debts. It's a scam, and I wrote of it several times.

What's new is I am not getting reports of this any longer. The last report made to me came on Oct 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016. This is a big change, since I got accustomed to getting two to six calls every day on this topic. What happened?

Here's a guess – Several news outlets reported on October 6<sup>th</sup>, Indian police agencies reported raiding nine call centers there, and arresting 70 people for participating in this scam, in Ahmadabad, India. On October 28, the US Dept of Justice announced a grand jury in South Texas unsealed indictments charging twenty people in the US, and thirty-two in India, with crimes such as conspiracy, money laundering, wire fraud, and impersonation of a US officer. Agents arrested all those people in the US. Everyone knew this scheme originated in India, but it came as a surprise to me to learn about so many US conspirators. It seems these crooks needed help in this country to move their money off-shore. They used prepaid debit cards and wire transfer services, plus an informal and unregulated money transfer system from Asia called *hawala*.

So this was a pretty sophisticated and organized scam. The prosecutors report 15,000 victims lost \$300 million in the scam in the last three years. Let's hope we've heard the end of this one.

## HOW DO ROBO-CALL TELEMARKETERS GET YOUR PHONE NUMBER?

Many readers call to report telemarketer robo-calls, even though they listed their phone on the Do Not Call Registry. And they ask, "How do they get my number, it's unlisted." Or it's a cell phone, never listed.

A press release from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) gives us a clue about the answer to that question. Dated November 1<sup>st</sup>, the announcement tells us about a scheme hatched by a group of companies called Consumer Education Group. These folks created websites and "landing pages" which asked consumers visiting those websites to submit requests for information on different things, like solar panels, reverse mortgages, or walk-in bathtubs. If you wanted this information, you needed to leave your name and phone number. After collecting the phone numbers, these companies sold that information to other telemarketers, acting as what that industry calls "lead generators". What they did was illegal, but they did it for three years, making over two million calls, and earning \$2.3 million. The

FTC wanted all that money back, but Consumer Education Group claims to be broke, so the FTC settled for \$100,000.

This is a pretty good example of how your phone number gets out there. Particularly on the internet, many websites offer coupons, surveys, free trials, gifts, or contests. A lot of this is designed just to get your contact information, so someone can pitch something to you later.

### **LOCAL SCAMS**

A Clinton man, Bob, called to tell me, he received a phone call from a man claiming to work for Direct TV, Bob's cable provider. The caller wanted to "switch up" Bob's receiver reception to allow better reception. To do this, the caller needed \$150 from Bob's credit card. If Bob didn't go along with this, chances were his reception would worsen. Bob felt suspicious of the call. For one thing, the caller seemed to have trouble remembering who he worked for. He told Bob at different times, he worked for Direct TV, at other times, he worked for DISH.

Well, he didn't work for either one, and Bob figured this out, hanging up on the caller. This was a ploy to get Bob's credit card number, nothing more.

### **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](mailto:randymeier@gapa911.us)

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