

A call from Microsoft (scam)

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Phone Call Scamming

I've received several other calls about this, so it's time for a tech tip! Actually I've included this topic in another tech tip, but wanted to ensure the information reaches the masses. Kathy Starbuck emailed me, asking about an interesting call she received. She did the right thing, she approached the situation with a healthy (*not paranoid*) skepticism, then consulted with her IT professional (enter PcComputerGuy, as he takes a bow!). Here is Kathy's email:

Hi Nick,

I just wanted to tell you about a phone call I received tonight. Also wonder if you've heard about it from others.

She said Windows users were being called because of a virus that had gotten through Windows system. She told me many people infected didn't even know it as their computer was working just fine. This virus corrupts files on the pc. She wanted to check my computer for the virus and remove it. Of course, I told her I was not interested. I asked how would I know if this was a scam or not and I wasn't going to risk my personal information being given out and I wasn't going to let someone into my computer who I did not know. Now get this, her response was that I could turn off my internet while they did the pc check!

I have caller ID and checked the area code. It's in MO. My caller ID gave a name. Is there someone to whom I can report this?

Thanks Nick.

Kathy

The other reports I received were very similar to this.

This new tactic is just another method of trying to hijack your credit card information, and take over your computer, usually to use it as a spamming machine or "bot". This is even a little more dangerous in that if the caller can convince you they are legitimate and you grant them access to your computer - they can then disable your internet security software that was doing it's job, keeping you protected from the internet baddies out there.

These people often claim they are from Microsoft and have detected a virus running on your computer and are going to help you in cleaning it up. They look busy for a little while on your computer, then tell you that you need to purchase some software for \$80 bucks to finish cleaning the computer. Of course, this software does nothing of the sort, and if you fall for it - you've just given the bad guys your credit card info.

Let's apply some logic to this.

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- Microsoft isn't watching everyone's computers. They have PLENTY to do without babysitting millions of windows computers.
- Companies don't contact you about your computer issues. It would be nice, but support in the IT field of that caliber is almost non-existent.
- You have seen no signs of infection on your computer - everything seems to be running fine because you do of course have a GOOD internet security product on your computer.
- If you wanted to have fun you could probably quiz them as to what the make and model is of your computer and watch them babble some nonsense. I mean, if they can tell your computer has a virus on it, and that it's a windows computer, surely they can tell you what the make and model is.

In essence, if you receive such a call, know it's a scammer trying to get your credit card information. If you are not busy, waste the persons time by asking a lot of silly questions. By doing this, you are taking up their resources from scamming the next person, and therefore are doing your small part to making the world a better place! DO NOT give them access to your computer. Do not give ANYONE access to ANYTHING that calls you. This advice goes beyond computers, to any type of scam in general.

If someone calls from Visa, claiming to see fraud on your account and need you to provide them the complete credit card information, it's a scam. If they ask for a small piece, like the last 4 digits, then it's probably on the up and up. If you want to be extra safe, you can inform them you will call back to the number on your credit card then provide the requested info. This ensures that you are talking to Visa and not Tarik in Arfica (where most or much of the scams take place).

Kathy asked where she could report such activity. You can report internet scams here:

<http://www.ic3.gov/default.aspx> [2]

Don't expect a whole lot to happen though. The difficult, perhaps impossible issue with using internet technology to scam people is the anonymous nature of the internet and technology in general. All one needs to do is ditch their prepaid phone, phone card or IP address and they become very difficult to track. Notice I said difficult to track, not impossible. However the question then becomes how much resources do we want to devote to tracking down each and every scammer internationally - and then what laws can be used against them in these countries? It becomes quite messy and generally isn't worth the effort.

As noted before, scamming isn't all bad. Imagine all the fun ways you can waste their time!

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