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BBB COMMUNICATIONS

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CRA PHISHING SCAM IN TIME FOR TAX SEASON

Better Business Bureau - Hamilton, Ontario (February 19, 2009)

A new scam tries to extract personal information under the guise of the Canada Revenue Agency.

A new phishing scam is circulating through the Canadian email system in time for 2008 tax filings.

The email suggests recipients are entitled to a tax refund from the Canada Revenue Agency. In order to receive the refund, users must click on an embedded link that directs them to a Web site posing as the CRA. Visitors are prompted to fill out an online form that requests tax-related information, including Social Insurance Number, date of birth, full name and the tax amount of their returns.

When you go to the site, the phishers have lifted all the graphics and everything from the Canada Revenue Agency site, so it all looks as if you are actually at the website of CRA. However, there are clues that point out the site's illegitimacy.

All Canadian government agencies have a link for those consumers who prefer French as their preferred language. Or in some instances, both French and English are provided together in the same e-mail if in fact a federal government agency is sending you an email. French is not provided or offered as a link in this email which quickly raises suspicions.

The second clue is the URL. "It's not cra-arc.gc.ca. It's actually a Web site located in a foreign country. The most recent complaint forwarded to the BBB shows a re-directed website of <http://www.outhosting6.nl>. The suffix .nl is normally a website that originates from the Netherlands. However, further research indicates at least one other redirection to yet another foreign country.



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With this information attackers can very easily steal the victim's tax refund and then sell all their personal information the BBB warns.

The phishing site is currently live and there is no indication of when it will shut down. The BBB has received several complaints and queries regarding this phishing scam. It is difficult to locate the culprits behind such fraudulent activity. In this particular case, it's multi-jurisdictional. It is targeting users in Canada, the e-mail message contained a redirected website originating from the Netherlands and the actual phishing Web site is hosted in yet another country altogether the BBB advises. Canada Revenue Agency is aware of the threat.

A couple of months ago, the CRA added a "Fraudulent Emails and Letters" section on its homepage in response to the recent increase in tax-related scams. The "Fraudulent Emails and Letters" section is continuously updated, but individuals questioning the validity of an e-mail or letter from the CRA should call to confirm the communication.

But the request for personal information is the first indication of fraudulence. The CRA does not request by e-mail personal information of any kind from taxpayers. That should be the public's first clue when it comes to e-mail phishing scams. Banks, federal and provincial government agencies, EBay, PayPal, the Better Business Bureau and other large well known organizations will not request personal information via email from the public.

Contact Information:

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