

SCAM WARNINGS

1. OFT AND NIGERIAN FINANCIAL CRIME SQUAD JOIN FORCES TO COMBAT SPAM FRAUD

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) and its law enforcement partners in Nigeria, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) are warning consumers to be wary of unsolicited e-mails asking for help in moving large sums of money in exchange for a share of the spoils. These scams are nicknamed '419' scams after the relevant section of the Nigerian Criminal Code. Many, but not all, originate from Nigeria and West Africa. There are even some claiming to be from Scotland!

All the scams share a common theme. The e-mails often appear to come from a respected official, such as a bank manager or a government agency. The victims are ultimately asked to pay money in advance, to cover eventualities like, taxes, insurance, legal fees, handling fees and bribes that amount to thousands of pounds.

The EFCC of Nigeria is taking action on a range of measures to combat '419' scams, such as monitoring activity at cyber cafes in Nigeria, signing a memorandum of understanding with Microsoft to tackle cyber crime and taking on a significant number of cases against fraudsters based in Nigeria.

OFT recommends that you forward any '419' scam e-mails received to euroteam@oft.gov.uk before deleting from your computer.

If you need further advice please contact:

North Yorkshire Trading Standards Tel: 01609 768 654 E-mail: trading.standards@northyorks.gov.uk

2. BEWARE OF £50 A MINUTE FAX BACK SCAM

The Trading Standards Service in North Yorkshire is warning businesses of a new twist on the fax back scam. They were alerted to the problem when a local hotel reported that it had received a number of phone calls asking for maps, hotel brochures and menus to be faxed. The callers in each instance gave a fax number with the access code of either 001 or 006. 001 is the international access code for North America and 006 is the access code for Australasia. The caller usually suggests that they are looking to book most of the rooms in the hotel for an extended period during a quiet time of the year. The local hotel responded to the request on one occasion and was landed with a huge bill as sending the fax cost **£50 a minute!**

North Yorkshire Trading Standards' advice is not to respond to requests like this for information but to direct callers to any website where the information can be accessed for free, or to offer to post it out. We would expect that both of these offers would be rejected as the caller is not interested in the details, he is only interested in the fax fees.

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3. NEW INTERNET INVOICE SCAM

If you should receive an invoice from a company offering to send your domain name to 20 major search engines and to send you a report each quarter with your search engine position and ranking – beware!

The invoice comes from the London office of an American company and although it does state the following on it: *"This is not a bill. This is a solicitation. You are under no obligation to pay the amount stated unless you accept this offer."* The invoice is in the sum of £65 for a year's listing, which is over three times the amount they charge to their American customers!

We would advise you to check carefully any invoice you receive. Although this is marked that it is not an invoice, it certainly looks enough like one to confuse. **Please make sure that all staff who handle your accounts are aware of these 'invoices' and know not to pay them.** If you are in any doubt please contact the Secretariat and we can provide you with a copy of one WE have received!

4. DRUGS & SAFETY AWARENESS BOOKS

We have warned members of this scam in the past, where a company rings up claiming that advertising has been taken in a Drugs & Safety Awareness booklet for distribution at local schools. This scam is still operating as we were recently advised by a member who had been phoned by an aggressive cold caller demanding payment for advertising they had supposedly agreed to.

A recent DTI notice reports that another such company has recently been wound up following an investigation into their dealings. **Again, please ensure your staff are alerted to this type of aggressive telephone scam.**