PRESS RELEASE
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CUT PRICE GOODS AND JOB VACANCIES, OR ARE THEY?

Hotline.ie Warns about Online Identity Theft

Hotline.ie is appealing to the Irish public to be vigilant about identity fraud when making online transactions. Recently, Hotline.ie has noted an increase in false job advertisements, fraudulent websites offering goods at knock down prices and other ploys by criminals intent on tricking respondents into parting with personal and banking details. Soaring Internet use and what is for many, a lack of familiarity with the online world has attracted criminals looking to prey on the unwary. Over 64%* of the Irish population use the internet daily to make transactions such as emailing, online purchases and banking that require key personal information, exposing them to cyber criminals who try to gather this information to commit identity theft. The Irish journalist Louise Williams is a textbook case of how this type of crime can snowball into a serious situation. In January 2011 she was arrested in Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam for internet fraud. Criminals had been using her identity to launder large sums of money, opening accounts in her name from as far back as 2005. Commenting on current trends in online identity theft, Paul Durrant, Manager, Hotline.ie said:

"The Internet is an amazing resource, that has allowed us to book hotels, cinema tickets and buy consumer goods both easily and securely from the comfort of our homes. Unfortunately, with more and more people using the internet to conduct their business, criminals see it as an easy way to gather personal information and use this for fraudulent purposes. The scams and malware they're using are becoming increasingly more convincing and sophisticated. It can literally take years before you realise your identity has been stolen and on average up to three months to resolve the situation. The public needs to learn the tell-tale signs of possible scams and take counter measures:

1. Ignore emails asking for bank or personal details in order to apply for a job. Rarely are people employed based solely on online interaction and no legitimate company would send out random unsolicited e-mails to recruit staff. If you are "hired" as part of these scam jobs you will likely be asked to transfer money to other accounts. You have been tricked into a money laundering operation and if the police catch up with you, you could be prosecuted. Legitimate companies do not need to use your bank account; they will have their own.

2. When buying goods online, always remember that if an offer is too good to be true, it probably is. Online consumers should compare prices across a number of sites offering the same goods. If you click through to site from an e-mail offer make sure it really is the company it is supposed to be from. Never give full contact details, phone numbers, etc. without checking the website against an external source like the phone directory (directories for other countries are online). It's important to search the company online and check whether there are any warnings about scams on forums."

Paul O'Brien, an Irish Navy engineer from Cork, was scammed out of thousands of Euro when he purchased 2011 Rugby World Cup tickets from an unofficial website. After applying for tickets through a Norway-registered firm he believed to be an official site, he gave away his credit card details and was charged €3,600 for tickets he never saw. Besides not receiving the goods they paid for, people have reported lots of further transactions being made on their credit cards in other countries.

According to the European commission, more than 1m** people are victims of cybercrime across the globe each day. Credit card details are being sold between organised crime groups for as little as €1 per card and bank credentials for as little as €60, the cost of which reaching a staggering US$388bn worldwide. With a recent survey by Eurobarometer*** revealing that Irish social media users are more likely to volunteer personal information online than other EU country, it is likely that identity theft will continue to increase in 2012.

////Background

The Hotline, run by the Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland (ISPAI) since November 1999, is part financed by the European Commission's Safer Internet Plus Programme. It is supervised by the Department of Justice, Office for Internet Safety (OIS), in cooperation with An Garda Síochána and is a member of INHOPE, the International Network of Hotlines. Hotline.ie provides an anonymous facility for the public to report suspected illegal content encountered on the Internet, in a secure and confidential way. Hotline.ie's objective is to have illegal online content, such as child pornography, racist hate speech and Irish based scam sites removed from the Internet.

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*Survey conducted on 1,000 adults in Ireland by Behaviour and Attitudes on behalf of Hotline.ie

Daily internet transactions Ireland - 34% of Irish internet user's conduct online banking transactions, 57% look for goods and services online and 37% purchase goods and services online - SPECIAL EUROBAROMETER 359: *Attitudes on Data Protection and Electronic* - - http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_359_en.pdf

**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Tackling Crime in our Digital Age: Establishing a European Cybercrime Centre - *http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/doc_centre/crime/docs/Communication%20-%20European%20Cybercrime%20Centre.pdf#zoom=100*

***SPECIAL EUROBAROMETER 359: *Attitudes on Data Protection and Electronic Identity in the European Union* - http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_359_en.pdf

RTE Documentary on one: The Louise William's Story – *I can tell by looking at you* - http://www.rte.ie/radio1/doconone/radio-documentary-stolen-identity-ireland-holland-passport.html

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The Irish Examiner: Paul O'Brien http://www.irishexaminer.com/world/kfeycwidcwid/rss2/

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