

Infotech: the spam that can catch your IT department out

For several weeks, our own web domain manager has been deluged with spam from a company that wants to panic him into spending a large sum of money on services we don't need or already have.

The latest in a line of increasingly urgent-sounding mails is headed "Domain Notification: silkscreen limited This is your Final Notice of Domain Listing" - and yes, the typos are verbatim.

Many of the domains in The Anti Money Laundering Network group - and we have many domains which we hold to prevent cybersquatters and others pretending to be part of our Group - have been receiving "Notices" saying that we should make "necessary changes" to our registration details for our domains.

But there is enough about the mail to warn us that it may be a scam.

First, it purports to come from a business called "Domain Listing Services" but the disclaimer refers to a business called DLC. We have seen this kind of inconsistency before and it usually means that it's a recycled fraud where the business name has been changed to fool victims, but the fraudster has failed to change the name all the way through.

And sure enough, a check on the address given in the spam throws up that the same address was used in 2005 for a remarkably similar scheme - by "Domain Listing Center, Inc."

Both the 2005 "notice" and those we have been receiving en masse contain the following: "If you are not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that disclosure, copying, distribution or the taking of any action in reliance on the contents for this letter is strictly prohibited."

This is what the 2005 "notice" said:

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| | | |
|---------------------------------|--|----------------|
| DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES: | ANNUAL WEBSITE SEARCH ENGINE LISTING | \$40.00 |
| Premium Package | FROM SEPT 1,2005 THRU SEPT 1,2006 | \$40.00 |
| | TOTAL | |
| SUBSCRIPTION INCLUDES: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Custom keyword research• Optimized title and meta tags• Submission to 900 search engines and directories• safe follow-up re-submissions every 3 months• Helpful professional support | |

THIS IS NOT A BILL. This is a solicitation. You are under no obligation to pay the amount(s) stated unless you accept this offer.

| Domain Name | Amount | Requested Reply |
|--------------------|---------------|------------------------|
| www.[removed] | 40.00 | November 25th,2005 |

THIS NOTICE IS A SOLICITATION AND A RECEIPT OF PAYMENT WILL CONFIRM YOUR ANNUAL LISTING

*100% SATISFACTION IS GUARANTEED OR YOUR MONEY BACK

Please select the number of years you would like to signup for

1 Year \$40

2 Year \$70

5 Year \$150 (Recommended)

10 Year \$200 (Best Value)

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And this is what the current version says

*DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES:

Premium Package

* *ANNUAL WEBSITE SEARCH ENGINE SUBMISSION FROM AUGUST 1,2008 THRU AUGUST 1,2018 OR * *FROM AUGUST 1,2008 THRU AUGUST 1,2013**

TOTAL* _*\$295.00*_ * _*\$185.00*_ _

*SUBSCRIPTION INCLUDES: * *

Custom keyword research *

Optimized title and meta tags *

* *Helpful professional support

* THIS IS NOT A BILL. This is a solicitation. You are under no obligation to pay the amount(s) stated unless you accept this offer.

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*Domain Name *_www.[removed].com _

*Amount *_ _

*Requested Reply *_ July 21st,2008

THIS NOTICE IS A SOLICITATION AND A RECEIPT OF PAYMENT WILL CONFIRM YOUR ANNUAL SUBMISSION

*100% SATISFACTION IS GUARANTEED OR YOUR MONEY BACK

Please select the number of years you would like to signup for

[] *10 Years \$295 (Best Value, Most Recommended!)*

[] 5 Years \$185* *

[] 2 Years \$85

[] 1 Years \$75

Of course, there's the small matter that the address given is in Canada but the spam does not say which dollars to pay in.

In both 2005 and now, the spam gives addresses at hotmail.com - hardly the mark of a legitimate internet business. The current one is domainlistingservices@hotmail.com

And in 2007, the spam was circulating again, still using the name Domain Listing Center, Inc.

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It is, we suppose, on some level amusing that their data is out of date: some of the domains they are writing about are domains we abandoned several years ago, suggesting that they are re-using the old data from their previous activities.

However, it is interesting to note that they are using the same drop-box provider, at 8171 Yonge Street, Thornhill, Ontario for their. Indeed, they are even using the same drop box number.

The latest law on money laundering in many countries requires the operator of drop boxes and instant and virtual offices to undertake due diligence in relation to their customers and to take steps to identify and report suspicions of money laundering. As the purpose of this drop box is to collect cheques which, one presumes, will be negotiated, then the operator of 8171 Yonge Street may wish to find out a little more about the latest Canadian law (it came into force in the past few weeks) and to consider the activities of "Suite" (code for "mailbox") 149.

To wrap up, several years ago, a German court found that a company sending out invoices for payment for directory entries in the hope that companies would simply pay up under them was committing a fraud.

Although DLS or whatever it calls itself this year says in its note, and its measures to make sure that, technically, it meets the requirements of the USA's Can Spam Act (return address, unsubscribe arrangements) and its declaration that "THIS IS NOT A BILL. This is a solicitation. You are under no obligation to pay the amount(s) stated unless you accept this offer," we believe that the format of the note, the urgency in the heading and the early body of the note creates an impression that it is imperative that the money is paid.

It isn't.

And so far as we are concerned, any unsolicited commercial email, regardless of whether the USA thinks the inclusion of an address etc. legitimises it, is spam.

The final reason we are convinced it's a fraud is simple: the top of the letter is laid out as an invoice. the sections quoted above are, effectively, an afterthought and actually detract from the effectiveness of the scam.

When it first opens in your email preview pane, the extended stuff is below the line.

What you see is an address, your domain name, a "Final Notice" and a what appears to be a bill for the sum of \$295 or \$185 for ten years or five years' service respectively, headed "Annual Website..Submission."

That's sneaky.