

This story taken from:

http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&cid=569&ncid=738&e=3&u=/nm/20030721/tc_nm/tech_phisher_scam_dc

WASHINGTON (Reute

U.S. regulators said on Monday they had charged a 17-year-old boy with using "spam" e-mails and a fake AOL Web page to trick people out of their credit card information and steal thousands of dollars.

Officials at the Federal Trade Commission said they had agreed to settle their case against the teen-ager, who was not identified because of his age, after he agreed to pay back \$3,500 he had stolen, and to submit to a lifetime ban on sending spam.

It's the first enforcement action the FTC has taken against an Internet "phishing" scam -- the use of spam, or unwanted junk e-mail, to lure computer users to look-alike Web sites, where they are deceived into forking over personal financial data.

"We're only beginning to discover the extent of these e-mails. They're only beginning to proliferate right now," FTC commissioner Mozelle Thompson told a news conference.

In the case cited on Monday, the teenager's e-mails told recipients they needed to update their AOL billing information and instructed them to click on a hyperlink connected to the "AOL Billing Center."

The link diverted people to a phony AOL Web site that contained the company's logo and links to real AOL Web pages, the FTC alleged. There, they were instructed to enter their credit card numbers, along with their mothers' maiden names, billing addresses, social security ([news - web sites](#)) numbers, bank routing numbers, credit limits, personal identification numbers and AOL screen names and passwords.

A spokesman for AOL, a unit of media conglomerate AOL Time Warner (NYSE:[AOL - news](#)), said the company welcomed the FTC's action.

Spokesman Nicholas Graham said almost anyone can mimick any company's logo and graphics, and he advised Internet users to "beware and be vigilant.

"We've always told our members that AOL will never ask them for their password or billing information. It's the golden rule of AOL," Graham said.

The teen-ager used his newfound information to go on an online shopping spree, the government charged, and to log on to AOL in his victims' names and send more spam. He also recruited other people to take delivery of fraudulently obtained merchandise he had ordered.

An FBI ([news - web sites](#)) official said at the news conference that the agency receives about 9,000 complaints a month about phony e-mails and Web sites.

Officials said there were more phishing cases under investigation but provided no firm numbers.

In March, Internet service provider EarthLink Inc. (Nasdaq:[ELNK - news](#)) said it had blocked a phishing scam that sought to collect credit-card and bank-account numbers from its customers.

Many EarthLink subscribers received an e-mail message urging them to resubmit their personal information or face termination of their accounts, due to a "recent system flush."