



FRAUD TIP OF THE WEEK

“RELAY” Fraud Scheme - An old scam with a new twist

By Detective Paul Henninger

Identity Thieves are creative and continually come up with new ideas to hide their identity and to catch their next victim off-guard.

Recently, a local mattress retail business in Salem received a phone call from a potential customer. When the owner of the business answered the phone, a “Relay operator” greeted him. Relay operators are a free service provided by the telephone companies and some Internet services for hearing impaired (deaf) persons to use to communicate with hearing persons. The communication can be by typing, or “signing” if the hearing-impaired person has a webcam connected to their computer. The operator reads or watches the message and speaks it to the hearing person.

In this case, the fraudster is probably not deaf, but was trying to catch the mattress business off guard or disguise a foreign accent. After the initial phone call, all communication was done by e-mail. The suspect represented himself as a pastor of a church in Hawaii trying to purchase about \$2,000 worth of mattresses for his church. The suspect wanted to use a credit card (stolen) and asked the business to verify the purchase amount on the card before proceeding. In addition, the suspect wanted to pay the full amount with the card, including shipping. The next request put the scam into full operation. The suspect asked the mattress business to contact a specific shipping company, arranged for by the “pastor,” and the mattress business would pay for shipping costs and transportation. The “shipping company” would have been a partner in this crime. The suspect was also after the mattress business’ checking account or credit card information. The mattress business was wise enough to first call the credit card company, which led to discovering the owner of the credit card number did not know his credit card account was being used fraudulently. One point for the “good guys.”

Research on this scam showed that the scammer also hit a mattress business in Grants Pass.

TIPS:

- **Fraudsters are always coming up with new scams and ways to trick you into giving them your personal or banking information.**
- **Scammers are not nice people and many times use religion, or an alleged belief in God, as part of their scam.**
- **Scammers may claim to be disabled, or say they represent a group of disabled persons.**
- **Scammers commonly victimize the disabled and may get them involved in cashing counterfeit checks or re-shipping stolen merchandise.**
- **Scammers sometimes claim to represent charities.**
- **Do not respond to any unsolicited telephone calls or e-mails. Stop...Think...Hang Up! Stop...Think...Don't Click!**
- **Do not give out your personal information, including your banking information, to anyone on the phone, or through e-mails, unless you know them. This applies to business owners, as well.**

- **And remember -- “Stranger Danger.”**

