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Cyber thieves target nervous bank customers amid crisis

By Herb Weisbaum

Cyber crooks are at it again. Internet crooks hope to use the turmoil in the banking industry to steal your identity.

The e-mails they send out look real. They look just like a security alert from Chase Bank.

But the bad guys are phishing. They hope you'll bite and believe there's something wrong with your bank account and click on the link they provided. After all, it says "Chase" right in the link. But that link will take you to a bogus site.

These dummy Web sites are very professionally done. The more accurate they are, the more people are going to fall for them. And often times, it's very hard to distinguish between the real Web site and the dummy Web site.

When I landed on the bogus site, I had no trouble logging on. I made up a user name and a password. The ID thieves figure most people will use their real ones.

They want you to get in and land at the part of the site designed to harvest all your personal information.

"If I had fallen for this and given them my social security number, credit card number and all the other information they were looking for, what would they have done with it? Nothing good, according to the state Assistant Attorney General Paula Selis.

"They could bleed your bank account. If they took your credit card information they could use your credit card number to run up charges. They could use your social security number and your account information to create an account for themselves and again, steal your money by pretending to be you and run up credit in your name," she said.

So save yourself the trouble. Don't ever go to the dummy Web site; just delete the e-mail.

Internet fraud experts say they expect an explosion of these bogus e-mails sent not only to Chase customers but also to WaMu, Wachovia and other bank customers. They've already seen some that look like they're from the FDIC.

Tom Harkins, a fraud expert with Secure Identity Systems, says there's only one thing you need to remember: "No bank, no credit union, no financial institution will ever send an e-mail to a consumer or one of their customers asking for any of this information," he said. It doesn't matter how official the e-mail looks. It doesn't matter how urgent the message sounds. Never, ever click on that link.

No bank or financial institution will ever send you an e-mail asking for your personal information. If you get one of these e-mails, hit delete. Want to put your mind at ease? Call your bank at the number you normally use and they'll tell you the same thing.

ABOUT SECURE IDENTITY SYSTEMS

Secure Identity Systems is the leading provider of managed total identity theft protection systems that safeguard financial institutions, businesses, individuals, and households. For more information, visit secureidentitysystems.com/