

Get Safe Online Week: 17th to 21st NOVEMBER 2008

17th November, 2008

London - 17 November, 2008 – As the fourth annual Get Safe Online Week begins today, the UK's internet safety awareness initiative is encouraging all internet users to take steps to ensure that they, and their computers, are adequately protected.

Experts at GetSafeOnline.org have estimated that working adults on an average salary can be worth £14,500 (per fraud attempt) to online criminals – taking into account recommended savings allowance and typical access to plastic credit [1 – refer to note below].

According to GetSafeOnline.org, internet fraudsters take as much advantage of an individual's accessible finances as they can in a short space of time, before moving on to the next victim. For most people, this could mean emptying their current and savings accounts, and spending the full limit of their credit cards.

The aim of Get Safe Online Week, however, is to give everyone the tools and confidence they need to enjoy and use the internet safely. "The internet is a great place to be," says Tony Neate, managing director of GetSafeOnline.org. "We are actively encouraging more people to go online, but in doing so, to ensure that they are safe and secure. We want to draw attention to the fact that online criminal activity can be a sophisticated business, but that each of us can take steps to prevent ourselves from becoming a victim."

Neate adds: "If internet users invest a relatively small amount of time and money in ensuring they are fully protected and up-to-date, the risk of such financial loss is almost negligible. To install the essential software and learn about the key safety measures on the Get Safe Online website takes a matter of a few hours [2] – a small but worthwhile inconvenience compared to the potential loss."

Encouragingly, 85% [4] of UK internet users have some form of anti-virus software in place to protect their computers. However, the 2008 Get Safe Online Report, published today, shows that almost half (48%) of UK internet users are still not updating their anti-virus software frequently enough to ensure it remains effective. In addition, almost a quarter (23%) do not have any anti-spyware protection, and nearly half (47%) do not have website authentication software to protect themselves from so-called 'phishing' attacks.

Notably, the number of phishing attacks, which involve sending fraudulent emails designed to trick internet users into submitting their financial or other confidential details, is rising sharply – 23% of UK internet users surveyed said that they or someone they knew fell victim to such an attack this year, compared to just eight per cent in 2007. The attacks are automated and involve sending thousands of messages, so only a few responses are required to make it profitable.

Nick Staib, director of GetSafeOnline.org and senior manager at HSBC, warned that there are other, less obvious costs associated with internet crime. "If your financial reputation has been compromised through identity theft, this could have an impact on your ability to obtain credit or borrow money in the future. Even with an explanatory note on your credit record, you may be viewed as 'high risk'."

Commenting ahead of the annual Get Safe Online Summit [4] taking place in central London this morning, Home Office Minister Alan Campbell said: "It is important that we stay one step ahead of criminals who increasingly use sophisticated computer networks and the internet to commit and

facilitate crime. That is why we recently announced a new £7million police unit dedicated to tackling cyber crime and clamping down on internet fraud.” [5]

For information and advice on how to guard against online identity fraud and other internet crime, visit the Get Safe Online website at www.getsafeonline.org.

- Ends -