

Protecting Phone Users from Internet Dialler Scam

The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) in Ireland published a decision notice on 20 September 2004 regarding the protection of consumers from rogue autodialler programs and modem hijacking. The problem arises when consumers are not aware that their Internet dial up settings have been changed, with the result that the user is connected to the Internet at international call rates instead of the normal call rate. Subscribers realise the underhand practices when they receive their telephone bill with high call charges to international numbers.

The damages are significant. As ComReg described “[...] over 300 telephone subscribers have contacted ComReg so far this year as a result of this scam. The amounts involved have ranged from €20 to over €2,000. The continued unchecked operation of such programs will not only cause consumer hardship through excessive telephone charges but could impact on Internet use by reducing confidence in the security of networks and systems.”

In order to solve this problem, ComReg took the extraordinary measure of requiring that Internet Service Providers alert their subscribers about the problem of rogue autodialler programs and recommend measures that users can take to protect themselves from the problem. Moreover, ComReg has directed that Direct Dialling Facilities to a number of destinations from which the majority of the current problems appear to arise be suspended, except if a telephone subscriber requests unblocking that specific phone number.

Caroline Simard, GREX Advisor

Adapted from: Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg)

(<http://www.comreg.ie/fileupload/publications/ComReg0499.pdf>) (20 September 2004)