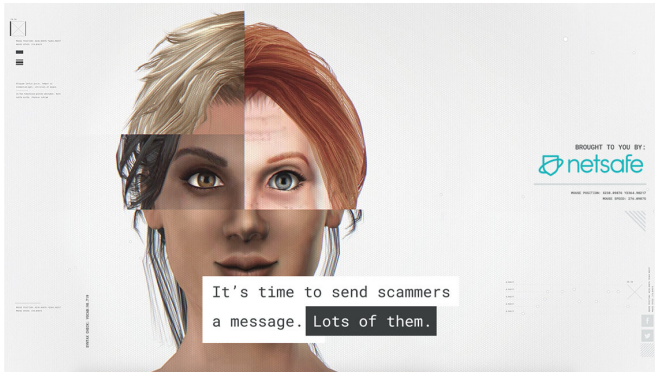


Scammers get their just rewards: Silly questions and no deal

13 November 2017, by Nancy Owano



(Tech Xplore)—The notion that a sucker is born every minute may have originated in the 19th century but resonates in 2017.

Evidently, humans have not evolved as quickly as technology. "\$12 billion is lost globally to phishing scams every year," said New Zealand company Netsafe. "It's time we fought back."

A man of royal lineage just needs half your rent money to access an account to collect his inheritance and you get a reward big enough to buy your apartment building.

An agency you never heard of informs you there is an enormous refund awaiting and you need to respond now.

A communique ablaze with multiple exclamation points tells you your system is at risk and to respond immediately.

Sure. They just need your particulars, such as birth date, address, and bank numbers.

Netsafe has devised a way to play their game via

Re:[scam](#), an AI program designed to seem as if it is biting the bait but responds with time-stalling and frustrating questions.

"Re:scam," said *Geek.com*, is "a chatbot that wastes scammer's time so you don't have to."

(The stalling tactics are particularly funny.)

How it works:

If you get a scam email, you forward it to Re:scam (me@rescam.org). The AI starts its conversation with the scammer.

"When you forward a scam to me I adopt one of my many personas and I engage them in conversation, so they waste their time talking to a computer instead of targeting real people."

The chatbot takes on multiple personalities and assumes male or female genders and voices, different accents (We heard elderly, younger voices, different accents including American English, British, and a vague hybrid of European and British speech via the [video](#).) The chatbot can continue for as long as possible.

Your email address is not included when they engage with the scammer. They use their own. The company FAQ explained the mail is sent from a proxy account opened for the purpose of replying to [scammers](#).

Here is where the fun starts for observers but pain all the way for the hapless scammers. Jordan Minor, *Geek.com*, said Re:scam "acts almost like a fly trap for shady online [characters](#)." The AI gives a scammer false hope but instead lets loose with questions, anecdotes and jokes to waste the scammer's time.

If time is money, then the time-wasting tactics by the bot means the less time the scammers have to

chase [real people](#).

Sample exchange:

Dear Illuminati, what a wonderful surprise! I would love to join your secret club. Do you do a Bingo Night?"

"There is no Bingo Night. Please complete attached form with bank details for your receipt..."

Some might question, wait, why go to the bother when all one has to do is delete the fishy-sounding email, and you're done; no need to rope in any special tool?

That's easy. Maybe too easy. Jordan Minor, *Geek.com*: "Ignoring and deleting a scam email is an easy way to avoid some personal headaches, but it just kicks the can down the road instead of solving the bigger problem. The scammer will then just immediately target someone else."

The chatbot collects information and keeps learning, according to video notes, and can share what it has learned to help people avoid becoming the next victim.

Actually, though, it would be unfair to call all the scam victims hopelessly naïve. Scam techniques unleashed online have become more sophisticated and more credible since the "inheritance" pleas of yesteryear.

When you may be told you have a refund waiting, won a prize, or have a bill you need to pay, or your computer has a serious infection and the so-called fixers need remote access to your machine, the wording is such that you may be unsure if you should reply or not.

"Re:scam is an initiative aimed at helping people from becoming fraud victims by occupying the time and resources of scammers through deploying a well-educated artificially intelligent chat bot. Instead of junking or deleting a scam email, you can now forward it to Re:scam who will continue the conversation indefinitely – or until the scammer stops replying," said Netsafe.

"Re:scam will turn the [table](#) on scammers by wasting their time, and ultimately damage the profits for scammers."

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