

Is That Phone Call Really from Google? DURHAM REGION UNDER ATTACK BY SCAMS OF ALL KIND BE ALERT!!!

Business owners beware. We ran a similar article a few months back.

But the scammers are back in full force and once you become a victim. There is nothing you can do.

It appears that during hard economic times. Scams go on the rise.

Everything from fraudsters pretending to be Canada Revenue Agents claiming that you must act right away and send \$500. or else face criminal charges... to the many that pretend to be working either for/or Durham Region water works attempting to collect and or sell you something you don't need.

This year has been a record year for frauds. Unfortunately these fraudsters look for the ignorant of the facts and or those that are desperate for a particular outcome.

Case in point on the most recent. They stomp on people's ignorance of the internet and social media. They also play on the fact that they are masking their true company with the name GOOGLE PLUS.

The most recent attack targeted local small to medium merchants. Merchants that have had a very hard quarter and are hurting for exposure and cash flow.

OPTIMIZING companies like LOCAL LISTINGS or GOGGLE COMPLIANCE utilize call centers in the United States to solicit Canadian businesses under the guise of being licensed by Google Plus. (they are not). Google Plus has nothing to do with these Optimizing companies.

In the United States these practices are highly illegal. What are optimizing companies?

An Optimizing company is a private company that will charge you a fee to manage your company profile on the internet. A service that normally is FREE online.

Most victims have limited or no knowledge of the internet so they fall easy targets for these fancy talking crooks.

It is estimated that in Durham alone 1000 victims have been fooled by these con artists based out of the United States.

Once we began to receive calls on this scam due to the fact that many that fallen victim could not call the perpetrators back. We at the Central Newspaper conducted our own investigation and these are our findings:

NORMALLY THE LOCAL BUSINESS GETS NUMEROUS CALLS THAT SOUND LIKE THIS: "HI THIS BRENDA YOUR LOCAL GOOGLE SPECIALIST,

(a lie they are from the Optimizing company)

IT IS EXTREMELY URGENT THAT WE SPEAK TO THE BUSINESS OWNER, WE TRIED TO REACH YOU VARIOUS TIMES. OUR RECORDS INDICATE THAT YOUR LOCAL GOOGLE PLUS LIST-

ING HAS NOT BEEN CLAIMED AND VERIFIED BY YOU THE BUSINESS OWNER (that is a lie, no verification is required by GOOGLE. This is how they hook the victims into thinking they will miss out on the listing that is FREE by GOOGLE)

IT WILL ONLY TAKE A FEW MINUTES OF YOUR TIME. PRESS ONE NOW TO SPEAK TO ONE OF OUR GOOGLE SPECIALIST. (Lie, you get transferred to a call center of either 'LOCAL LISTINGS OR MAIN STREET' optimizing company out of Utah. U.S)

SO WE CAN CHECK THE STATUS OF YOUR GOOGLE PLUS WEB SITE (again for the victims. Those that do not know the net will fall for it...as GOOGLE does not issue sites but listings. All these scammer do is google your business and get your info to scam you.)

CONSIDERING AN ACTUAL FACT THAT YOUR LOCAL CUSTOMER WILL 30 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO USE GOOGLE TO FIND YOUR BUSINESS RATHER THEN THE YELLOW PAGES

(This for those ignorant of the internet and marketing are put in fear of losing the little business they are getting so it plays on doubt and insecurity)

IF YOU LOCAL GOOGLE BUSINESS LISTING IS NOT VERIFIED BY THE BUSINESS OWNER YOUR CUSTOMERS WILL NOT FIND YOUR BUSINESS.

(This is an outright lie as all businesses are automatically put on GOOGLE as it is a search engine and needs to keep up info up to date automatically. YOU DON'T HAVE TO PAY).

PLEASE PRESS ONE TO SPEAK TO A LIVE GOOGLE AGENT SO WE CAN ASSIST YOU. *(The attendant that comes on is not from GOOGLE but from the fraudulent optimizing firm that normally does not exist.)*

PRESS TWO TO BE REMOVED FROM THIS LIST. *(You never get removed).*

This is the actual conversation with Amanda.

'Hi this is Amanda from Google Plus Business. May I have your business name please.'

First question, we asked. Are you from Google?

She replied, 'No I am with Local Listing.'

What is Local Listings? She said, 'An optimizing company out of the U.S. We are looking to update your GOOGLE business listing or it will expire and no one will be able to find you. This will take a few minutes.' We asked, 'Is there a charge for this listing?'

She said, 'Yes \$359 dollars'. We asked why should I pay for something that is free by Google?' She replied, 'Well GOOGLE has changed the rules and now you need to verify.' *(this is a total lie. Google has not changed anything and all*

listings are free)

When asked why should I pay for something that is free? She hung up. Tried calling the number she had called from and the number went 'THIS NUMBER IS NO LONGER IN SERVICE' 1-631-201-1191. Called numerous times and at different days. Nothing.

Tried it from another phone number, it went through This time we got through and Brad Carter answered.

This is the conversation: 'Hello technical support my name is Brad am I speaking with the business owner.'

We stopped him and said, 'I got a question for you where are you situated.' He answered, 'Southern Utah.'

I asked are you part of Google? he said, 'We are called local listings and a certified Google partner that works with Google business solutions.' (this is a lie, they have nothing to do with Google).

'I asked him that I wanted to send in a cheque and if I could have their mailing address'. He said, "I can't give you one. The reason you can't send in a cheque is because we are registered and being recorded by the FTC and so everything is done under FTC rules and we have to do it on the phone. We can take a cheque by phone.'

I asked what do you mean by FTC rules and what does it stand for?' He said, 'The Federal Trade Commission to make sure we are telling you what we are suppose to be telling you. (Totally and complete lie. The FTC has nothing to do with these outfits). It is more for your protection then ours..'

I asked, 'Why do you have to update a google listing when it is done automatically?'

He replied, 'Well once they don't get claimed and verified and optimized they become expired and get flagged to be removed (lie). What we do is we charge you a one time fee of \$359. and we make sure it gets optimized and up to google standards because we use the google format and you never ever have to do that again. (this is a complete and total lie and for anyone not knowing Google or the net would fall for it.)

Google updates automatically. No real optimization required.'

When asked, why should anyone have to pay for something that is free. All you are is an optimizing company putting fear into people.

He said, 'I am not saying you have to go through us to optimize and no you don't need to optimize in order to be on google. There are 250 optimizers out there that help people with this...'(an honest crook. He admits he is scamming people and that he is an optimizing company).

Let me ask you another question. If this is not a scam, why can't we send a cheque? He

pressed, 'because like I said, the Federal Trade Commission all our calls are recorded and we have to do the entire thing on line. Just like going to Amazon. You have to do all over on line because it is all done over a computer dialing system. (openly admits he is from a call center scamming people).

When pressed for the actual physical address. He said, 'I don't actually know what our physical address is.' I asked you don't know where you are at.. or where you drive to every morning?' He said, 'yes we are in souther Utah, but I don't have our address. I just don't have the address. Yea I am sorry I don't know where I am. I can probably go look it up. We are MAIN STREET MARKETING, I can't give out our address until you become a client of ours'.

I said thank you and terminated the conversation. This is obviously a open scam. Unfortunately many

small businesses across the country report continuing to receive calls from telemarketers claiming to be Google. Although this scam is several years old (it began in earnest in 2011 around the time that Google Local was really taking off), it obviously has yet to run its course.

These calls are automated, meaning when you pick up the phone you'll hear a recorded message asking you to press a button to speak with a representative.

While the "representatives" claim an association with Google, they are actually from unethical companies that are selling verification services or various online marketing schemes, trying to procure sensitive information, or otherwise luring small businesses into giving them their money. The information gathered in many cases ends up being sold to other telemarketers. Victims never see their money again and there is nothing they can do about it.

These type of robocalls are actually illegal in the United States (under the Telephone Consumer Protection Act), and Google has nothing to do with them. However, the company's reputation has suffered for this, as many recipients have come to mistakenly believe over the years that Google is involved with the calls.

Google has had enough. In September, 2015, the Internet giant filed a lawsuit against the SEO firm it claims is behind many of these telemarketing calls, Local Lighthouse Co., based in Tustin, California.

The suit is pending in the Northern District of California. Along with the lawsuit, Google also launched a new Safety Center page, giving small business owners clear directives on how best to handle, report, and prevent robocall scams.

How to Know if It's a Scam
To start, it's important for small businesses to know that Google

does reach out to businesses to verify business information or confirm details for Google Maps. However, in this case, they will only ask for location information or questions related to a business listing; no selling or exchange of money is involved. The best way for small businesses to protect themselves is to keep themselves informed on Google's latest business practices.

On the help page of its My Business site, Google makes clear what phone calls do not come from the company. Knowing Google's company policies can help you detect the red flags much sooner. **Remember that a Google associate will never:**

Charge a small business for inclusion in Google My Business or Google Search.

Offer a fee-based service to improve your business's search ranking or manage your online profile.

Ask you for sensitive information over the phone about your Google account, including your Google password or verification code.

If you do happen to receive a robocall claiming to be associated with Google, the Federal Trade Commission has now established a consumer information site that walks you through the steps you can take to protect yourself and your business. In addition, if your number is already on the Do Not Call list, you are strongly encouraged to file a complaint at the National Do Not Call Registry.

In Canada if you become a victim of such a crime you are out of luck as there is no law or regulation that protect consumers. Another spin off this scam is the same approach but this time they promise to put you on GOOGLES front page. Something that is impossible for any company to promise. The representation of names are done alphabetically and by random binary hits on a particular site.

People with this scam have been hit with \$500 - \$1,500/mth to keep a phantom ranking on a page that would have ranked them no different.

Another common robo scam that is the:

CONGRATULATIONS YOUR BUSINESS QUALIFIES FOR UP TO \$250,000. NO CREDIT CHECKS REQUIRED. PRESS ONE TO SPEAK TO ONE OF OUR ASSOCIATES.

This is another suckers scam. They ask you for your business information and claim to conduct a financial analysis at no cost to you. This con comes from a company called American East Funding out of New York. The number to be flagged is 347-875-9690. They take your info and sell it to telemarketers. You never see a dime. In some cases victims have been asked that they can

get approved if they send fees. Google's main number: (650) 253-0000. These scam calls often originate from boiler room set ups in Souther California and are similar to the scams that were perpetrated by organized crime for many years and apparently still do.

In another unrelated scam: Victims Lose Money in Virtual Kidnapping Scam

The DRPS would like to warn the public about a "virtual kidnapping" scam after the parents and friends of an 18-year-old student were defrauded of over \$200,000.

The scam, known as "virtual kidnapping," has recently surfaced in Durham Region but has been going on for many years in North America. Virtual kidnapping is an extortion scheme designed to leverage ransom money from the victim's parents, spouse or friends.

The 18-year-old female victim, who is a student in Montreal, was approached and told she had been implicated in a crime ring. She would be arrested and incarcerated if she didn't follow instructions. She was told to take photos of herself tied up and in distress, making it appear that she had been kidnapped.

The scammers received these images from her and then sent them to her mother in Oshawa, demanding ransom money through the "WECHAT" app. Between her parents and some friends, over \$200,000 was transferred to an unknown bank account in an attempt to free the 18-year-old. The mother contacted the DRPS on Wednesday, May 16, 2018 to report the kidnapping and locate her daughter. Investigators determined the daughter was still in Montreal and reached out to Montreal Police, who located her, unharmed, in a hotel room.

She had been manipulated into sending the staged photos under threat of arrest if she didn't comply and was told to stay in the hotel room. She was reunited with her family.

There have been several similar incidents throughout the GTA and police are warning the community not to engage in any communication with these scammers. If you have been approached to participate, contact your local police service with all relevant information. Safeguards to prevent being a victim of this type of fraud are outlined in the FBI link: FBI Virtual Kidnapping

For more information on scams or to report a scam attempt, visit the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre at: www.antifraudcentre-centreantifraude.ca or call 1-888-495-8501.

Anyone wishing to report a fraud in Durham Region is asked to contact Durham Regional Police at 1-888-579-1520.



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