

Consumer Corner

New Tool To Beat Internet Fraud

(NAPSA)—The key to protecting yourself while shopping or making donations over the Web is to know who you're dealing with—before you send money. But scam artists bank on the fact that consumers wrongfully think they can't verify who's on the other end of their computers. As a result, criminals run thousands of successful Web scams each year.

For instance, Internet criminals sometimes set up fake merchant sites that look similar to and have Web addresses close to the addresses of established shopping sites. They'll then send e-mails directing people to those sites in an effort to "sell" merchandise that doesn't really exist. In 2004 alone, consumers who fell victims to such scams lost an average of \$895 each.

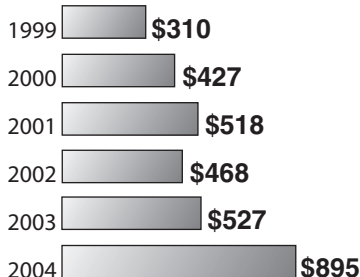
People can protect themselves by using services such as GeoTrust's TrustWatch service to verify the legitimacy of Web sites and blogs—and to find out whether online merchants, companies and charities are (or aren't) trustworthy. The service's free search engine lets users run queries on sites or groups they're thinking of doing business with. They can then view easily understood green, yellow and red verification symbols beside each search result.

"By using a very sophisticated identity verification scoring technology, we can obtain a trust rating for any site on the Web," explains GeoTrust CEO Neal Creighton.

Sites that can be verified as safe receive a green rating. Sites

Web Buyer Beware

A look at the average amount victims lost per Web-based fraud cases:



Source: National Fraud Information Center



that don't have enough data to be verified but aren't known to be fraudulent receive a yellow rating. Known fraudulent sites display a red warning sign.

If a site is deemed to be both verified and secure for the exchange of private data, it receives a lock icon next to the green verification rating. In addition, the service also offers a Site Report link that users can access to get more information from additional sources, including TRUSTe, BizRate and CNET. Consumers can use this data as an additional way to choose what sites to do business with.

In the case of fake merchant Web sites, the service would show a yellow or red icon and have little additional verification information. Consumers who ran security searches would know to keep their distance.

To access the free service, visit www.trustwatch.com.