

 Yu Kin Len | Jan 22, 10 4:11pm

Recently, I have received a number of e-mails from different banks that asked me to update my personal details to reactivate my online banking account which had been frozen due to certain reasons.

Some e-mails asked me to do a certain survey for which they would reward me with RM200 and some even requested to use my bank account for money transactions for which I would be paid some substantial amount of money. All those e-mails needed me to key in my personal details such as my online banking account user name and password. I realized that these are those phishing e-mails which try to phish away my money.

Phishing is not a new thing in the market. For those who are aware of this scam, they will delete the email but there are those who get caught because the fake website from the phishing e-mail looks very similar to the bank's legitimate website.

This convinces them to provide their personal data without any doubt. According to a survey done by Harvard University in 2006, a well-developed phishing website manages to trick 90% of their survey samples. With a few clicks, their victims hard-earned money is phish-ed away.

With today's technology, the Internet makes our lives very convenient in many areas. However, there is a price to be paid for this convenience. To eliminate these sort of crimes, consumers should take the responsibility to report any phishing cases. In 2008, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) received only 86 phishing complaints, while phishing cases to the National Consumer Complaints Centre (NCCC) were also not significant.

The reported complaints could not represent the reality of seriousness of the phishing situation in Malaysia. Consumers should be more concerned and report such phishing cases to the related authorities so that other people will not fall for such a scam.

When we apply for credit cards in a shopping mall or every time when we fill up forms to participate in a contest, or whenever we answer some survey questions, our personal data is at risk of being exposed to third parties without our consent. E-mail addresses, telephone numbers, identity card numbers and house addresses seems safe to be provided to some agency but actually they could be diverted to someone else.

Therefore, we need to be careful with our own personal details and not simply give them to other people. A Data Protection Act has not yet been implemented in Malaysia. There are bank institutions and other agencies that sell our personal data to third parties without our consent.

The Consumer Research and Resource Centre (CRRC) hopes that our government can act fast to implement and enforce such an act as soon as possible to protect consumer rights and also to reduce the increasing incidence of cyber-crime in this country.

Consumers also need to learn more about the new technology that is available and be aware about the new scams that are happening because one day they might be trapped by the same tricks.

Sometimes the tricks might be different but they have only one goal that is to steal your money or belongings. We need to remember that there is no such thing as a free lunch in this world. We need to change our mindset. Greed can blind us to beautiful lies. Always be aware and alert of hidden risks in the market. Change begins with me!

The writer is attached to the Consumer Research and Resource Centre.

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