

BCS Group helps disabled internet users to be spam savvy in “scam awareness” month

11 February 2008: To support the Office of Fair Trading’s (OFT) scam awareness month, BCS IT Can Help is offering advice to disabled people to help them keep themselves safe online.

Bob Twitchin, Chair of IT Can Help explains: “Scams, whether online or not, are devised to trick people into parting with their money or personal details which could be used for fraud. While the OFT campaign is focusing mainly on scams which come through the letterbox targeting the elderly and vulnerable, we want to raise awareness about keeping yourself safe online. As internet and email users many of us find ourselves with an inbox of ‘spam’ and ‘phishing’ emails but there are many steps we can take to protect ourselves from such scams.”

Unsolicited email, commonly known as spam, accounts for 80% of all emails sent. Spam is the online equivalent of “junk mail” through the letterbox. “Phishing” emails are slightly more sinister and usually purport to be from a bank or organisation asking for personal details, including passwords, or for donations to an organisation.

BCS IT Can Help advisers have put together a list of top tips to protect against scams when using email and the internet:

1. Don't respond to ANY unsolicited emails. Don't even open them - if you do not recognise the sender or are suspicious, simply put the email into your “Delete” box. Spam emails are usually sent automatically to randomly generated email addresses some of which prove to be valid, by responding you are verifying the email address as active and will continue to receive spam
2. Never respond to the “remove link” that many spammers include in the email, it verifies your email address as active
3. Never divulge your personal details, bank details or passwords in response to an email purporting to be from your bank or building society. Real emails from banks and building societies never request personal information or verification of password or account details. Don't click on a link in such an email as it will go to a fraudulent site that looks like your bank
4. Report spam by sending the message plus the full header of the email, to sites such as www.spamcop.net which can then add the sender to their blacklists. Do not to open the message – use the “forward” button to do this
5. Install virus protection software to help guard against the accidental download of a virus
6. Make use of your internet provider's spam filter if one is available

Bob concludes: “Computers, the internet and email have transformed our lives and especially the lives of disabled people bringing the world into our living rooms and offices. By taking some very simple and sensible steps we can all continue to enjoy these benefits whilst remaining safe from potential scams.”

IT Can Help is a BCS members' group that assists disabled people with computer technology problems. It is built around a network of volunteers who offer disabled people free, computer-related assistance in their own homes, residential homes or at other locations such as day centres. Services offered include:

- Installing new equipment and software
- Helping to connect people to the Internet and use e-mail
- Getting people started with standard packages such as word processing
- Solving any technical problems that may arise
- Giving advice and assistance with hardware and software upgrades
- Helping people to get the most out of their computer and software

To request help from the ITCH Network call AbilityNet freephone (and Minicom) on: 0800 269545 or e-mail: enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk. More information can be found at www.itcanhelp.org.uk.

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