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Alabama Attorney General



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## **AG MARSHALL ANNOUNCES ACTION TO STOP TECH SUPPORT SCAMMER IN PART OF MAJOR NATIONAL OPERATION**

(MONTGOMERY) – Attorney General Steve Marshall announced the State of Alabama and the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) have obtained an order temporarily halting a technical support scam that tricked consumers into believing their computers were infected with viruses and malware, and then charged them hundreds of dollars for unnecessary repairs.

The FTC and the State of Alabama jointly filed a complaint in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Alabama against Trothsolutions Inc., Trothsolutions LLC, Quickkonto LLC, Crazy Bee Man of Palm Beach Inc., Edoorways International Corp., Escue Energy, Inc., and Airoways LLC, as well as individual defendants Madhu Sethi and Ila Sethi. The Sethis are a husband and wife who operate the businesses out of their home in Boca Raton, Florida, and offices in Birmingham and Huntsville.

The State of Alabama and the FTC have obtained a temporary restraining order and a preliminary injunction to halt the practices, freeze assets, and appoint a temporary receiver to take control of the business of the defendants. The court entered the temporary restraining order on May 1, 2017, and the preliminary injunction on May 10, 2017. According to the FTC and the State's complaint, the defendants have collected at least \$2 million from consumers.

This case is part of a major international crackdown on tech support scams called Operation Tech Trap, announced today in partnership with the FTC and other federal and state agencies. Most of the scammers targeted in Operation Tech Trap followed a similar pattern of misconduct.

"The actions of these defendants were extremely convincing to unsuspecting victims who were led to believe that they faced severe computer crises that could only be averted by immediately paying for very expensive services," said Attorney General Marshall. "The defendants manufactured false catastrophes and used panic-inducing tactics to defraud consumers of outrageous sums of money."

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According to the State's complaint, the defendants solicited victims either by phone or through pop-up messages, and particularly targeted senior citizens. The pop-up messages were designed to trick consumers into thinking their computers were infected with viruses, malware and other problems, and urged them to call a toll-free number for help. Once consumers called the toll-free number, they were connected to a call center and pitched by telemarketers who claimed to be affiliated with well-known technology companies such as Microsoft or Apple.

Consumers were told that in order to diagnose the problem, they must provide the telemarketers with remote access to their computers. After gaining access, the telemarketers purported to run a series of "diagnostic tests" that inevitably revealed the existence of grave problems requiring immediate repair by one of their "certified technicians." Through these high-pressure tactics, the defendants persuaded consumers to pay hundreds of dollars for unnecessary computer repair services, service plans, anti-virus protection or software, and other products and services.

"Defendants' entire business is predicated on fraud," the complaint states. "They are not affiliated with or certified by Microsoft or Apple. Their pop-up ads are incapable of identifying problems with consumer's computers and are themselves a form of malware. These ads are part of an elaborate and highly deceptive ruse designed to trick consumers into believing, without any basis, that their computers are in expensive need of repairs and software that only Defendants are capable of providing."

Among the alarming tactics used were the appearance of a screen similar to what is commonly known as the "blue screen of death" and dire warnings that the loss of the victim's data, including all documents and pictures, was imminent, and that private financial information was being exposed. "At every step of this process, Defendants psychologically manipulate consumers into believing that they are dealing with a trusted source, such as Microsoft or Apple, and that their computers are at risk," the complaint states.

Attorney General Marshall commended attorneys and investigators from his Consumer Interest Division for their excellent handling of this matter.

The Court appointed as receiver of the defendant entities a Florida attorney, Jeffrey C. Schneider, who is a partner in the group of Levine Kellogg Lehman Schneider + Grossman LLP. Victims may contact him by calling 305-403-8788.