

Telephone scam targets area elderly

Written by Wauneta Breeze
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By Josh Sumner

The Wauneta Breeze

Roughly a handful of citizens in the BWTelcom telephone service area have been the target of an international money-swindling racket in recent months, according to BWTelcom General Manager Randy Raile and the Chase County Sheriff's Department.

Of seven different BWTelcom customers targeted in recent weeks, one local couple did make the unfortunate mistake of transferring funds as part of the overseas scam. Instructed over the phone by an impostor posing as the family's grandson, the couple was asked to transfer \$1,800 to an offshore account from the Western Union in Atwood, Kan.

When the perpetrator called back, in an attempt to repeat the crime, the couple realized the person they were speaking with was not their grandson, and alerted authorities.

Most of the calls are being traced back to Google Voice — a free online service from which people can make telephone calls. Crooks see the service as convenient, not only because it's free, but because they've also had success using it to remain anonymous.

So, how are the criminals finding out the personal information of the people they're trying to victimize? Most likely, according to Raile, through Facebook.

It's easy for criminals to find out personal information about people who have low security settings on Facebook. The thieves search for users who have created a list of their family members' names and relationships. Then, they call the elderly victims pretending to be their

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grandchildren.

“They say, ‘Grandma and grandpa, help me out,’” said Raile. “Please don’t tell mom and dad, I’ve been in an accident,’ or ‘I’m in jail for a DUI.’ They usually know enough about the person they’re impersonating to do a reasonably good job of convincing the grandparents to give.”

In the single known instance where money was actually transferred to criminals, funds were sent to an account in Israel, said Raile. The calls, however, are believed to have originated in Canada.

“Basically, these scammers have devised a way to be almost untouchable,” said Raile. Untouchable because they’re outside the jurisdiction of most US law enforcement agencies.

“There’s not much we can do, because they’re out of Canada,” said Chase County Sheriff Kevin Mueller. “What we’re trying to do is warn people not to fall for these types of scams.”

Raile echoed Mueller’s precaution.

“Be cautious when someone calls soliciting money,” said Raile. “More times than not, it is a scam.”