As a computer tech I receive many calls from people that have been scammed by various Internet and email schemes. Lately the most common complaints were from people that have been sold fake computer repair services.

Have you recently been contacted over the phone by someone claiming to represent "Windows Technical Services", "PC Windows Support", "Virtual PC Doctor" or possibly even from *Microsoft*? They may have asked if your computer was running slowly or showing any other problems. The caller instructs you to download software that gives them remote access to your PC. You are then 'shown' where a virus is on your computer. The caller then offers to sell you a six or twelve-month computer service contract and takes your credit card details over the phone. They will they give you the name of their website, which often looks very legitimate. But after closer examination, you will discover that they are based out of India and not California as they claim.

These calls often begin something like this, "Microsoft was worried about the problems and would like to put things right". Or they may use your name (listed in the phone directory) and say "Hello Mrs. Smith, this is John calling from Microsoft Windows, we noticed that your computer is running slow and may be infected with several viruses". If you ask how much it would cost to fix, often the initial answer is "it's free".

This may be followed by a very aggressive sales pitch and eventually they provide evidence that your computer contains a number of entries that showed "errors". At some point they say that, for $89.00, they would provide a 12-month 24/7 service for your computer. Then they will tell you to download a program that hands over remote control of your computer so the caller could install "fixes".

They often spend quite some time investigating the "problems" and then take you through various operations which produced lists of data which show "serious warnings". Of course there never was a virus, and what's more you've just given the scammers access to your computer and they may have downloaded spyware, farmed your email address lists or even stolen your bank details as well as installing their own virus.

The "fixed" computers never had any problems, and the value of the service was dubious at best. Usually the computer is much worse off after the service is finished. These phone scams that offer "computer support" but ultimately defraud people, have been around for a number of years. The police are dealing with reports of this type oftelephone fraud on a daily basis.

So what can you do when you get these guys phoning you? If someone calls you out of the blue to say your computer has a virus, just hang up, or my favorite solution is to get a loud whistle and blow it very hard into the phone. It may not stop them, but at least they won't be calling you back!

If you have downloaded any software onto your computer as a result of this scam then you should unplug it from the internet immediately. Then call for an experienced and trusted computer technician to come and restore it for you. We recommend that you use a local company that can send a service tech to your home, someone that has many years experience, rather than a company that has a high turn-over of its staff.

It's quite alarming how many people are falling victim to this very persuasive phone scam. My recent experience helping computer users recover from this new threat has revealed that people are being tricked into paying these companies $90 - $450.00 dollars. If you have signed-up to a service contract and you believe it to be a scam, the first thing you need to do is to call your credit card company and cancel the card before the scammers can add more charges, then you can report the scammers and ask for a "charge back". And lastly, get your computer's security restored by a professional.

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