

Tech Support Scams Are Getting Smarter... ...Here's BBB Tips to Stay One Step Ahead!

Submitted by Kelvin H. Collins, President/CEO, Better Business Bureau

Serving the Fall Line Corridor, Inc. • BBB.org/central-georgia • Office: 478.742.9034 (Direct)

OFFICES: Macon: 277 M.L. King Jr. Blvd, Ste 201, Macon, GA 31201 • Augusta: 119 Davis Road, Ste 3-B, Augusta, GA 30907 • Columbus: 233 12th Street, Ste 911-B, Columbus, GA 31901

Many agencies celebrated “Safer Internet Day” by sharing tips to help us all be mindful of the importance of staying alert to potential safety and fraud issues online.

One area that continues to target online users are tech support scams. You’ve probably heard of the more traditional ways these have been attempted — the unexpected phone call from someone claiming to be a “technical expert” at a well-known company, warning you about a problem on your computer or email that you didn’t even know existed. Or the alarming pop-up that suddenly fills your screen, urging you to call a number immediately to avoid disaster.

In a somewhat similar twist, you could also be lured by someone who has advertised [fake tech support numbers online](#).

But scammers are evolving. BBB received a report on our [BBB Scam Tracker](#) site of a troubling new twist. In this case, the scammer responded online as if they were assisting someone trying to troubleshoot an issue via a help chat. The assistance seemed legitimate, but unfortunately it wasn’t. By the time the victim realized something was wrong, they had handed over more than \$1,200.

This just goes to show that tech support scams don’t just come to you — they’re hiding in the places you go for help too.

Here’s what was shared in the post on BBB Scam Tracker:

“I was trying to figure out why my printer would not work. I tried to Google the answer and ended up in a chat with someone who I thought was from Google. I let them into my computer and they said I had all kinds of issues that they could fix for \$199. They said my printer was not working because of all the bugs in my computer. They used scare tactics to upsell me three years of their "protection". I was dumb enough to give them \$1215. In the end all they did was add my computer to their Panda Dome account. The problem with my printer turned out to be that the ink cartridge door was not fully closed.”

No matter how you connect with a tech support impostor, there’s some elements that remain constant – they tell you they can fix the problem with your device, but only if they're allowed to remotely access the troubled device. Once access is granted, they’ll claim they’ve detected significant issues that build the need for more and more money to fix the problems and anti-virus software to avoid future issues.

That may not be the end of the scam, though. If you allow them remote access, the scammer may install malware on your device. Malware often scans files for personal information, which scammers then use to commit identity theft.

Here are tips from your BBB to help you spot and avoid tech support scams:

- Never give control of your computer to a third party unless you are absolutely sure it is the representative of a computer support team with whom you initiated contact.
- The same goes with payments. You should never give payment information unless you’ve confirmed you’re talking with an employee of a company you know and trust for transactions that you’ve determined are truly needed. Only pay by credit card, as this offers you the best protection against fraudulent transactions.
- Be cautious with sponsored links. When searching online for tech support, don’t automatically trust the ads that appear at the top of the results page. Scammers often pay for sponsored placements to make their fake companies look legitimate. Clicking one of these links could connect you directly to someone whose goal is to steal your money or personal information.
- Do not be fooled if a phony tech support scammer knows your name, address or even some facts about how your computer operates. Cybercriminals trade information about customers and often claim to have specific information about your computer that is very generic.
- Know how real tech support operates. Legitimate tech support companies won’t call you out of the blue to report problems with your device. Also, scammers can “spoof” phone numbers and business names to make the call appear legitimate.
- Look out for warning screens. Many tech support scams have started with an alert on the victim's computer screen. The pop-up includes a phone number to call for help. Instead of calling, you should disconnect from the internet and Wi-Fi by shutting off the device. When you restart it you should run an antivirus scan.

Here are steps recommended by your BBB if you or a family member find that you’re a victim of a tech support scam:

- Contact your bank immediately to report the incident and describe exactly what happened.
- Remove any software that you added to allow the scammer to remotely access your device.
- Take the infected laptop, tablet, mobile device, or computer to a [trusted local business](#) and have it checked out.
- Change all passwords used to access bank accounts, social media and other websites or accounts that contain personal information.
- File a report with [BBB Scam Tracker](#) and with law enforcement authorities, such as the [FTC](#).

BBB also has additional information you might find helpful, including:

[BBB Scam Alert: Need tech support? Be careful which number you call](#) and "[10 Steps to Avoid Scams](#),"

You can also [read BBB's complete study](#) that shares more details on who is behind tech support scams, how they're requesting money, who they're victimizing, as well as BBB's recommendations for dealing with the problem.

Kelvin Collins is president & CEO of the Better Business Bureau serving the Fall Line Corridor, serving 77 counties in East Alabama, West Georgia, Southwest Georgia, Central Georgia, East Georgia, and Western South Carolina. This tips column is provided through the local BBB and the International Association of Better Business Bureaus (IABBB). The Better Business Bureau sets standards for ethical business behavior, monitors compliance and helps consumers identify trustworthy businesses. Questions or complaints about a specific company or charity should be referred directly to the BBB at Phone: 1-800-763- 4222, Web site: [BBB.org](#) or E-mail: info@centralgeorgia.bbb.org.