



Get Safe Online Week 2009

Money Mule Recruitment Scams – FACTSHEET FOR MEDIA

What is a money mule?

A money mule is someone who, recruited by a fraudster, transfers money illegally gained in one country to another country, usually where the fraudster lives. The term comes from an analogy with drug mules.

Why do fraudsters recruit money mules?

Fraudsters behind many of these scams are based overseas. Typically, through the use of malware or phishing techniques, they have obtained financial details of victims in countries such as the UK. However, it's difficult for these fraudsters to transfer money from UK bank accounts overseas, or to buy goods and have them shipped, without raising suspicion. Hence, they recruit money mules to receive funds from the victims' accounts in the first instance, who then transfer the funds to the fraudster overseas via a money transfer service.

How are money mules recruited?

Money mules are recruited via a number of methods including:

- Classified advertisements on legitimate, mainstream recruitment websites, often made to look professional by mimicking the style and wording of other, legitimate advertisements on the site
- Vacancies publicised on fraudulent websites purporting to be legitimate businesses
- Approaches to people with their CVs available online
- Unsolicited emails
- Social networking sites, chat rooms and instant messaging

Jobs are often advertised with titles such as 'financial manager', 'money transfer agent', 'UK representative' or 'shipping manager', stating that no previous experience is required.

Every effort is made to convince potential mules that they are applying for a genuine job, with some fraudsters even issuing official-looking employment contracts for their 'employees' to sign.

They offer the chance to earn some 'easy money' for a few hours work each week, usually just requiring that mules have access to the internet. Experts at Get Safe Online report seeing earning offers for £2,000 per week for no more than a couple of hours of work each day.

Once recruited, money mules receive funds into their accounts and they then withdraw the money and send it overseas using a wire transfer service, minus a 'commission' payment.

What are the risks to web users?

- By allowing their bank accounts to be used to receive and transfer illegal funds, mules are breaking the law – even if they don't realise it.
- Mules can become part of a police investigation and are often the easiest part of the criminal chain to track down
- When 'caught', money mules often have their bank accounts suspended. Illegal funds can also be recovered from their account; this includes not only their 'commission payments' but the any of the proceeds of the fraud. For example, if a mule transfers £2,000 and took £200 as payment, the full £2,000 may be recovered from their account
- Being tagged as a fraudster, making it difficult to open bank accounts or obtain credit in future

How can internet users avoid becoming a victim?

Be cautious about any opportunities offering the chance to make relatively large sums of money for very little work or prior experience - if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is!

Be especially wary of offers from people or companies overseas, as it is harder to verify if they are who they say they are.

Research any company which makes you a job offer and check their contact details (address, phone number, email address and web site) are correct and whether they are registered in the UK. Never give your bank details to anyone unless you know and trust them.

If you think you may be a victim of one of these scams, contact your bank immediately.