(Approx. 574 words)

Tricky Spam Emails

By Jim Cerny, Forums Coordinator / Instructor, Sarasota Technology Users Group

www.thestug.org

vp1 (at) thestug.org

You probably are all aware by now of those awful spam emails that come to you in your inbox. But recently, I had a very sneaky and tricky spam email that appeared to come from a friend, and I need to tell you about it so you can be very careful.

First, I received a brief email from a friend of mine who was also listed in my contact list, but I found out later that the source email address was not really his. It “looked” like his, even having his wife’s first name in it, but it was NOT his email address; it was from a different email provider, which he never used. Yes, that was tricky all right, but later that week, I received one even worse. The email sent to me appeared to come from another friend and, being very careful, I “hovered” my mouse on the email address, and it did show his actual email address, exactly as it is entered in my contact list! But it was NOT from him. Fortunately, I called him, and he confirmed that someone had “stolen” his email address and was using it to try to get gift cards from people.

So, in addition to the usual email precautions, I would like to offer these to help you from being scammed –

+ Brief emails from a “friend” that say something like “Can you help me?” or “Can I ask a favor?” are clues that they are bogus. Call your friend to confirm if they really need your help. As they say, if it was really urgent, they would have called you, not sent an email.

+ If you do reply to such an email by mistake, you will get a follow-up email with a sad story and an urgent request for something like a “cash card” or donation. Don’t do it!

+ Do not reply or provide ANY personal information in ANY email. Emails can be forwarded to anyone anywhere. Valid email addresses are traded like stolen credit card numbers.

+ Do NOT send money or credit card information in any email. Instead, use your online banking to pay bills.

+ THINK – did the email text really appear to be something your friend would write to you? If there is the least bit of oddness about it, call the person.

How do these scammers get started? Our neighborhood has a directory provided to all residents, which includes phone numbers and email addresses. Many people purposely do not provide their personal information in such a directory. Once you get an email address, I suppose it is possible to tap into some emails sent by that address and thus obtain many more email addresses.

Finally, it appears a scammer can send an email that appears to come from someone else’s address, and yet they still receive replies to the scammer’s email inbox. How they do this, I have no idea, so be careful.

One final story – I was at the Walmart customer service desk when an older man was requesting a money transfer to his son, who needed money quickly. The Walmart people knew right away that it was a scam and refused to fulfill his request. The man was angry, but it was the right thing to do. He wanted to send “his son” several thousand dollars!