Man Charged for Trying to Steal User Data

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A man was arrested Monday for allegedly setting up a phony Internet portal site to lure victims into giving personal data, an official said. Police said it was Japan's first arrest linked to a form of identity theft called phishing.

Kazuma Yabuno, a 42-year-old office worker in the western city of Osaka, was taken into custody and accused of violating copyright and unauthorized access laws, a Tokyo Metropolitan Police official said on condition of anonymity.

Yabuno allegedly defrauded users with his phony Yafoo! Japan site, which closely resembled -- and has the same pronunciation in Japanese as -- that of popular Net portal and auction site operator Yahoo! Japan, the official said.

Police were investigating whether Yabuno came up with the scam to steal credit card information and other sensitive information.

Yabuno launched the Japanese-language site from a personal computer in February and managed it from computers at work and home, the official said. About 20 to 30 unsuspecting users visited the look-alike site weekly, he said.

Yahoo! Japan, which is owned by Tokyo-based Net investor Softbank Corp., said it had alerted authorities about the incident, according to media reports.

It's unclear how widespread such scams are in Japan.

In the United States, phishing victims cost U.S. banks and credit card issuers an estimated $1.2 billion in 2003, according to a report last year by Gartner Inc., an information technology market research firm.

A recent survey of American adults conducted by Denver-based First Data Corp., a major electronic financial transaction company, showed that 43 percent of respondents had received a phishing contact, usually by e-mail.

Associated Press

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