

Privacy watchdog warns job seekers to beware

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Online fraudsters are increasingly taking advantage of vulnerable job seekers by using online résumés to steal their identity, a privacy expert warned this week.

The threats range from job fraud, where a criminal group poses as a legitimate employer to launder money, to the sale of résumé details to database companies for use in background checks. The seemingly small act of posting a résumé publicly can have significant impact: over the past year, more than a dozen Americans have been accused of a felony because their identity has been used for online crime, said Pam Dixon, executive director of the World Privacy Forum.

"If you post your résumé publicly you are asking for identity fraud," she said during an interview with SecurityFocus. "If you have a fantastic résumé, that puts you at a high risk, because your identity will get nabbed, and they will use your information to set up a new account in your name and do criminal acts and it will look like you participated in this scheme."

Ironically, the major résumé services offer tools to help job seekers keep their identity private from the public, but workers fail to take advantage of the features because they do not understand the dangers, Dixon said. However, a majority of résumé services still don't take the issues seriously, she added.

Dixon presented the findings of several studies authored by the World Privacy Forum at the Computer, Freedom and Privacy Forum last week in Seattle. In addition to identity-theft dangers, other privacy problems exist as well. She warned that inaccuracies in employment databases have hurt people's chances of getting the job.

The campaign to raise awareness of job fraud and inaccuracies in employment databases comes as major data leaks by companies such as ChoicePoint and Bank of America have raised public awareness of identity theft.

In a typical case of job fraud, for example, a criminal group will contact a job seeker offering employment handling money transfers. For each transfer -- usually of a sum just below the federally mandated \$10,000 reporting requirement -- the "employee" gets to keep 5 percent.

Other criminal groups pose as employers and attempt to convince job seekers to give up sensitive information, such as social-security numbers and bank account information.

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