Media Release

Friday, 28th February 2020

New telco rules aim to stop scammers

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) has welcomed the announcement of additional identity checks as a positive step towards protecting mobile phone users against scammers.

The introduction of the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)'s new Telecommunications (Mobile Number Pre-porting Additional Identity Verification) Industry Standard 2020 aims to prevent fraudulent number porting by requiring telcos to apply stronger identity checks before they transfer a mobile phone number to another provider.

After stealing a person's private information (such as date of birth), scammers use these details to fraudulently port the consumer's mobile number from one provider to another. Once a phone number has been ported, thieves can access bank accounts and cause serious damage to victims.

As the voice for phone and internet consumers in Australia, ACCAN has heard countless stories from people who have fallen victim to fraudulent mobile number porting and identity theft.

"This is a serious issue that causes significant harm to people all across Australia," said ACCAN CEO, Teresa Corbin. "The ACMA's action is a much-needed first step towards stopping scammers and protecting mobile phone users."

The ACMA has the power to direct telcos to comply with the Standard and fine those who fail to do so.

"The risk of up to $250,000 in fines should act as a deterrent to any telco who may have weak identity verification practices."

While ACCAN is broadly supportive of the Standard, there are still further opportunities to strengthen porting processes.

"Requiring all telcos to use multifactor authentication before they port a mobile number is a good idea, however, it's important that this two-step process is secure. SMS messages aren't secure enough to prevent fraudulent mobile number porting," explained Ms Corbin.

"We'd like to see the ACMA require telcos to use highly secure forms of verification such as hardware or software authentication tokens which are generated with a mobile app. We've already seen some government services adopt this approach through the development of the myGov Code Generator app."

A warning sign of fraudulent mobile number porting is when your mobile screen shows 'SOS only' where the reception bars usually appear.

Consumers who have had their number fraudulently ported should report the scam to Scamwatch and ReportCyber.

For help with identity fraud, contact IDCare.

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ACCAN MEDIA CONTACT

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The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia's peak communications consumer organisation. The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Commonwealth of Australia under section 593 of the Telecommunications Act 1997. This funding is recovered from charges on telecommunications carriers.

How to protect yourself from fraudulent mobile number porting

- Set up a secret PIN or password with your telco to identify yourself
- Don't use your mobile phone number and birthdate on social media and other public accounts
- Create strong passwords for your online accounts and use different passwords for different accounts.
- Use two-step verification to login to your online accounts wherever possible
- Don't leave mail that contains personal information in an unlocked letterbox

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