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New York Spammer Arrested for Making Threats Against Internet Messaging Company and Sending More Than 1.5 Million Spam Messages

A New York state teen-ager was arrested yesterday at Los Angeles International Airport after allegedly sending waves of unsolicited "spam" e-mail messages to an online instant messaging service, and then threatening additional attacks unless the company hired him as a consultant.

Anthony Greco, 18, of Cheektowaga, New York, is charged in a criminal complaint with violating the federal CAN-SPAM Act, which was passed by Congress in 2003 to cut down unsolicited e-mail messages.

According to a criminal complaint filed Tuesday in Los Angeles federal court and unsealed this morning, Greco created thousands of fraudulent accounts at instant messaging service MySpace.com in October and November 2004. Greco used those accounts to send more than 1.5 million spam messages containing advertising for mortgage refinancing and adult pornography to MySpace.com users. MySpace.com is an online community with instant messaging services used primarily by teen-age children. MySpace.com spent well over $5,000 to delete nearly 1.5 million unopened "spam" messages from its servers and to take protective measures against additional attacks.

Days after the attacks began, according to the complaint, Greco contacted MySpace.com, took responsibility for sending the spam, and proposed that he be granted "exclusive" rights to send commercial e-mail to MySpace.com users. He also offered to protect MySpace.com against other spam advertisers. When MySpace.com did not respond to his proposal, Greco sent messages to MySpace.com in which he threatened to show other spammers how to send messages to MySpace.com users if the company did not hire him. In his messages, Greco noted that sharing his spamming techniques would "open a Pandora's box of Spam" on MySpace.com's computer system and potentially take MySpace.com offline.

The complaint charges Greco with three offenses -- violating the CAN-SPAM Act, threatening to cause damage to MySpace.com's computers with the intent to extort, and causing damage to a protected computer. If convicted of all three offenses, Greco faces a maximum possible penalty of 18 years in federal prison Greco is scheduled to appear in federal court in Los Angeles this afternoon.

A complaint contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

This case was investigated jointly by the United States Secret Service and the Los Angeles Police Department as part of the Los Angeles Electronic Crimes Task Force.

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