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New York Teen Pleads Guilty to Making Extortion Threats Against Internet Company

A New York state teen-ager arrested last month for threatening to tell other spammers how to send waves of unsolicited messages to an online instant messaging service has pleaded guilty to making extortionate threats against the company.

Anthony Greco, 18, of Cheektowaga, pleaded guilty in federal court in Los Angeles late yesterday to a single count of threatening to damage the computer systems of MySpace.com with the intent to extort.

During yesterday's hearing, Greco admitted that he wrote a computer program that was later used to create thousands of fraudulent accounts at instant messaging service MySpace.com in October and November 2004. The program automatically sent more than 1.5 million spam messages containing advertising for mortgage refinancing and pornography to MySpace.com users. MySpace.com is an online community with instant messaging services. MySpace.com spent more than $20,000 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, Greco contacted MySpace.com, took responsibility for writing the program used to send the unsolicited messages, 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 in what Greco deemed to be a timely manner, 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 continue negotiating with 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.

Greco pleaded guilty before United States District Judge S. James Otero, who is scheduled to sentence the defendant on September 26. Greco faces a maximum possible sentence of five years in federal prison.

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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