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ONLINE IDENTITY THIEF SENTENCED IN VIRGINIA TO 14 YEARS IN PRISON FOR SELLING COUNTERFEIT CREDIT CARDS LEADING TO MORE THAN $3 MILLION IN LOSSES

WASHINGTON – A Hammond, Ind., man was sentenced today in U.S. District Court in Alexandria, Va., to 14 years in prison for operating an online business that sold counterfeit credit cards encoded with stolen account information, announced Assistant Attorney General Lanny A. Breuer of the Criminal Division and U.S. Attorney Neil H. MacBride for the Eastern District of Virginia.

Tony Perez III, 21, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Liam O'Grady. In addition to his prison term, Perez was ordered to pay $2.8 million in forfeiture and a $250,000 fine and to serve three years of supervised release. Perez pleaded guilty on April 4, 2011, to one count of wire fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft.

In his plea, Perez admitted that he ran an online business that sold counterfeit credit cards encoded with stolen account information. According to court documents, Perez utilized multiple online personas in criminal "carding forums," Internet discussion groups set up to facilitate buying and selling stolen financial account information and other goods and services to promote credit card fraud. In these forums and in other electronic communications over the Internet, Perez regularly purchased or received stolen credit card account information.

U.S. Secret Service special agents executing a search warrant in June 2010 at Perez's apartment found a counterfeit credit card manufacturing operation and nearly 21,000 stolen credit card numbers and related information in his computers and email accounts. According to court documents, credit card companies have identified thousands of fraudulent transactions using the card numbers found in Perez's possession, totaling more than $3 million.

The case was investigated by the U.S. Secret Service and was prosecuted by Michael J. Stawasz, a Senior Counsel for the Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section of the Justice Department's Criminal Division and a Special Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia.

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