

## **Shutting Down Scammers and Their Pop-up Ads [Computer Security Imposters]**

The following article is written by Bridget Small, a Consumer Education Specialist with the Federal Trade Commission and posted on July 8, 2016

Do you ever wonder how you can spot a tech support scam? Ads that pop up on your computer with messages like “Security Alert” or “Urgent Notice: your data may be at risk” are clear signs of a scam. The FTC has been after tech support scammers for multiple years. Now, the FTC and Florida Attorney General have asked a federal court to shut down six companies and hold their owners responsible for running a Florida-based tech support operation that took millions from US consumers.

The companies; including Big Dog Solutions LLC, PC Help Desk US LLC, and BlackOptec CE, Inc.; allegedly lured people to websites that made pop-up “security alerts” appear on computer screens. When users called the number in the “alert,” the FTC says they reached call center reps who told a series of lies.

First, the reps claimed they were authorized by well-known technology companies to service their product—they were not. They said they detected security or performance issues, like spyware, viruses, malware or presence of hackers on users’ computers—they had not. The FTC says the companies took \$200 to \$400 from each user for “repairs,” several hundred dollars more for new antivirus software, and pushed users to sign up for ongoing service that cost up to \$19.99 a month.

Do you need tech support? Online searches may not be the best way to find technical support or get a company’s contact information. Scammers often place misleading ads online, and pay to have their website and phone numbers appear at the top of search results. Instead, look for a company’s contact information on a software package or your receipt.

To check out a company, put the company’s name and the word “review,” “complaint,” or “scam” in your search engine. If you think that you responded to a scam, please report it the FTC.

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Posted July 8, 2016