



27/03/2013

For immediate release

ComReg Media Release

ComReg advises businesses to ensure that their phones are secure over the Easter period

ComReg has been made aware of a spate of business phone systems being hacked in recent weeks.

In the last 3 months there have been 16 cases reported to ComReg by operators. In one recent case of hacking, calls to the value of €30,000 made without the knowledge of the customer. This type of incident is of particular concern as we approach the Easter holiday when many businesses will be closed for a long duration and they will not notice their phones making thousands of international calls automatically.

The problem is that business phones, often known as PBXs, have features on them which may allow unauthorised third parties to dial into the system and place calls through the system without the knowledge of the systems owner. Also in many cases businesses use external parties to maintain their phone systems which means that external access to a PBX is required. PBXs have maintenance ports to enable these maintenance companies to dial in to the phones to diagnose problems. Unfortunately these access ports are often left open and have either weak or default passwords which are known by and easily exploited by hackers.

In some cases the systems can be hacked through the phone extensions when hackers dial in and access the system through those lines using the extension password, often 0000, 1234 or the same number as the extension.

What can you do?

If you use a third party to maintain your phones consider disabling the remote access and only enable it when you need agreed work done. If your maintenance company has remote access make sure they use a strong password and disable any default passwords.

You should ensure all your phone extensions have strong passwords to avoid individual extensions being hacked. These passwords should not refer in any way to the extension number.

If you don't need to make premium rate calls from your phones ask your operator if those numbers can be barred. Most businesses will need to be able to make international calls, but if yours doesn't then consider asking for these to be barred on your PBX system.

Phone systems are like computers. They are essential tools to businesses but if your computer held your bank details you would ensure that there were strong passwords and limited access. Remember that your phone system can also be used to take money from you and protect it appropriately.

If your phone is hacked you should ask your operator to contact ComReg urgently as we may be able to help, but immediate action is necessary as it is normally not possible to take action after a few weeks have passed from the date the calls are made. You should also report the matter to An Garda Síochána.

Notes to Editors

ComReg works with operators and other regulators internationally (especially in the EU) to combat misuse of telephone numbers.

See for example BEREC consultation:

http://berec.europa.eu/eng/document_register/subject_matter/berec/public_consultations/?doc=979

ENDS

Issued By

Eoghan McCarthy
Public Affairs Executive, ComReg

Ph: 01 8049758

eoghan.mccarthy@comreg.ie