

Estonian man faces cyber scam charges in US

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The United States District Court Southern District of New York in lower Manhattan, pictured on January 28, 2010

An Estonian man accused of being part of a ring that swindled advertisers out of millions of dollars by "hijacking" online traffic was hauled before a US judge.

Vladimir Tsastsin, 34, was extradited to a federal court in New York to

face charges including computer intrusion, wire fraud and [money laundering](#), according to US prosecutors.

"Now that Vladimir Tsastsin has been delivered to the Southern District of New York, he can answer for his alleged role in a scheme in which he and others manipulated Internet advertising techniques and reaped at least \$14 million in ill-gotten gains in the process," Manhattan US attorney Preet Bharara said in a statement, released Friday.

Charges against Tsastsin stem from "a massive and sophisticated Internet fraud scheme" that involved infecting more than four million computers located in more than 100 countries with [malicious software](#), according to the case against him.

The "malware" allowed Tsastsin and accomplices to reroute Internet users to websites where advertisers paid them for what were supposed to be legitimate visits.

The subterfuge is referred to as "click hijacking" in reference to people being sent to different website addresses than those promised in links they clicked on screens.

Malicious code in infected machines could also be used to replace digital ads at legitimate websites with marketing messages that earned money for the fraudsters, according to prosecutors.



Preet Bharara, US Attorney for the Southern District of New York, speaks at a press conference, on May 19, 2014

Members of the ring are believed to have earned at least \$14 million from click hijacking and advertisement-replacement fraud between 2007 and late 2011, laundering money through a set of companies.

Tsastsin was arrested in Estonia two years ago, when the US criminal indictment against him and six alleged accomplices was unsealed.

Five other Estonian nationals named in the indictment were previously indicted to the US, and two of them have pleaded guilty in bargains with [prosecutors](#).

The last suspected member of the ring, identified as Andrey Taame of Russia, is still being sought.

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