

# US man gets 27 months in international spam case

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A man who helped send millions of illegal spam messages to U.S. and international cellphones and computers has been sentenced to 27 months in federal prison by a federal judge in Pennsylvania.

Phillip Fleitz, 31, was handcuffed and ordered Monday to immediately begin serving the sentence.

Fleitz's two co-defendants previously received probation for their roles, and defense attorney Stephen Capone argued Fleitz should receive a similar sentence.

But the judge agreed with U.S. Attorney Jimmy Kitchen who said "Fleitz was the architect. It was his idea. He was the first to do it" and enlisted the others.

"This was a sophisticated and serious scheme," U. S. District Judge Maurice Cohill Jr. said in imposing the sentence.

Fleitz was one of a dozen U.S. residents charged with marketing illegal computer skills on Darkode.com, a cybercriminal marketplace disabled by the FBI in July. Seventy people in the U.S. and 19 other countries were targeted in that takedown.

From September 2011 to February 2013, Fleitz and two others earned between \$2,000 to \$3,000 weekly by conspiring to violate a 2003 law designed to protect cellphone and computer users from unwanted

marketing and pornography emails and text messages.

Fleitz has acknowledged operating the computer servers in China that the trio used to infiltrate personal computers of hundreds of thousands to millions of people in the United States and abroad.

Naveed Ahmed, 27, was sentenced to two years' probation last year. He wrote a program that helped match cellphone numbers with their carriers. That enabled the scammers to bombard the phones with unsolicited messages. Dewayne Watts, who is confined to his home for six months as part of his two-year probation, wrote the text messages meant to entice phone users to respond.

The computer and text-message spam both included Internet links. Those who received the text messages were told they had won gift cards that could be accessed by clicking the links.

In reality, those who responded were routed to Web pages controlled by Internet Cost Per Action networks, which are marketing companies that gather email addresses and other personal information. Such companies are legal, but using spam to drive traffic to the companies' websites is not.

"I just want to say I'm sorry," Fleitz said, adding that the rules and regulations governing marketing are among the things that "make this country great" and should be followed. "I was stupid for not doing so."

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