

Sprint targets unnamed employees in alleged Uzbekistan-based cellphone scheme

December 20 2017, by Mark Davis, The Kansas City Star

Sprint has taken its battle against cellphone trafficking in house, suing 20 unnamed employees along with an Uzbekistan resident in U.S. federal court. And the company ran a sting operation to investigate the scheme.

The 14-page lawsuit described a conspiracy in which to promote his scheme Adik Kummetov of Tashkent, Uzbekistan, allegedly recruited Sprint employees, or possibly employees of companies Sprint hired to provide customer care services.

Sprint has battled cellphone trafficking for years by filing lawsuits in federal courts around the United States. The company claimed many victories in a 2014 press release, but in a few cases, the targets fought and won including a Kansas City, Kan. man.

In its new lawsuit, Sprint has targeted insiders for the first time.

According to the [suit](#), Kummetov offered to pay these insiders \$10 per device to unlock Sprint phones so they could be used on other wireless networks to Sprint's detriment. It said he used Facebook to recruit them and Twitter to promote his unlocking services.

"Kummetov has also attempted or actually made contact with Sprint employees to get assistance unlocking phones," said the suit filed in U.S. District Court in Kansas City, Kan.

Sprint locks the phones it leases and sells to its customers so the devices

will work only on Sprint's network. It ensures the customers buy and use Sprint's wireless services and that lease customers pay for the phones.

Leasing customers repay the cost of the [phone](#) during the term of the lease and an additional payment or payments after the lease expires. Customers who buy phones upfront pay the manufacturers' price, Sprint's suit said, but also agree that the phones can be unlocked only according to Sprint's policy.

Once the phones have been unlocked, Sprint's suit said, may are resold overseas or used on other companies' networks.

According to the lawsuit, Sprint recently discovered that "unknown [customer](#) care support employees or employees of vendor call centers have been unlocking phones for Kummetov (as well as others) and receive payment for doing so."

The lawsuit does not name the employees, referring to them as "John Does 1 through 20." It suggests that Sprint has not been able to learn who they are.

Michael S. Foster, an attorney at the Polsinelli law firm representing Sprint, referred questions to Sprint. Sprint officials could not be reached.

Sprint does know of some individuals who helped Kummetov unlock phones for money. They were "undercover investigators" the company hired to prove the scheme. They contacted Kummetov and unlocked five Sprint phones and received \$50 via PayPal for their effort, the suit said.

"Kummetov then sent the investigators additional IMEIs (the numbers that identify specific phones) to unlock and stated he needed someone within Sprint to unlock phones. He also claimed he has been offering

unlocking services for ten years," the suit said.

Sprint's lawsuit charges Kummetov and the John Does with tortious interference with contracts or prospective business expectancy and with civil conspiracy.

It hits the John Does with four other counts, charging "breach of the duty of loyalty" to Sprint, fraud, violations of the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act and violation of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1988.

The suit seeks unspecified damages against Kummetov and the John Does, "permanent injunctive relief" to stop them from unlocking phones and other unspecified relief.

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Citation: Sprint targets unnamed employees in alleged Uzbekistan-based cellphone scheme (2017, December 20) retrieved 5 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-12-sprint-unnamed-employees-alleged-uzbekistan-based.html>

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