

FBI smashes US-Egypt cyber 'phishing' ring

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A crest of the Federal Bureau of Investigation is seen inside the J. Edgar Hoover FBI Building in Washington, DC. Investigators in the United States and Egypt have smashed a computer "phishing" identity theft scam described as the biggest cyber-crime investigation in US history, officials said Wednesday.

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The Federal Bureau of Investigation said 33 people were arrested across the [United States](#) early Wednesday while authorities in Egypt charged 47 more people linked to the scam.

A total of 53 suspects were named in connection with the scam in a federal grand jury indictment, the FBI said.

Authorities said the sophisticated identity theft network had gathered information from thousands of victims which was used to defraud American banks.

Wednesday's arrests were the culmination of a two-year probe involving US and Egyptian officials dubbed "Operation Phish Phry."

The investigation was described in statement as the largest cybercrime investigation to date in the

United States.

A series of raids early Wednesday resulted in arrests in California, Nevada and North Carolina.

A 51-count US indictment accuses all defendants with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and bank fraud while various defendants are charged with aggravated identity theft and conspiracy to commit [computer fraud](#).

"The sophistication with which Phish Phry defendants operated represents an evolving and troubling paradigm in the way identity theft is now committed," FBI Los Angeles acting assistant director Keith Bolcar said.

"Criminally savvy groups recruit here and abroad to pool tactics and skills necessary to commit organized theft facilitated by the computer, including hacking, fraud and [identity theft](#), with a common greed and shared willingness to victimize Americans."

According to an unsealed indictment, Egyptian-based hackers obtained bank account numbers and personal information from bank customers through phishing, and then hacked into accounts at two unidentified banks.

Once compromised accounts had been accessed, hackers in Egypt contacted conspirators based in the United States via text messages, phone calls and Internet chatrooms to arrange transfer of cash to fraudulent accounts.

"This international phishing ring had a significant impact on two banks and caused huge headaches for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of bank customers," acting US Attorney George Cardona said in a statement.

The investigation comes hard on the heels of a security breach targeting thousands of Microsoft Hotmail accounts.

Cyber-crooks evidently used "phishing" tactics to dupe users of Microsoft's free Web-based email service into revealing account and access information, according to the US technology giant.

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