

Geeky jargon leaves UK Internet users more vulnerable to online scams and viruses

Submitted by: AOL UK

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Internet users in the UK are being left confused and more vulnerable to online risks because of the incomprehensible jargon in use, according to a new Populus survey for AOL UK.

AOL's 'Do you speak geek?' study revealed that jargon such as 'phishing', 'rogue dialler', 'Trojan' and 'spyware' are a mystery to most Internet users, despite being commonly used in connection to serious online security threats.

For example, while a recent wave of financial scams via email has tricked some UK consumers into handing over their bank account details and even cash, the AOL survey revealed that 84 per cent of home Internet users do not understand the term 'phishing', commonly used to describe such scam emails.

- 83 per cent of respondents worry about their personal details falling into the wrong hands online
- Fewer than two in five (39 per cent) home Internet users understand the term 'Trojan', despite it being one of the most common online security threats
- Even though 76 per cent of home Internet users are concerned about the number of junk emails they receive, 16 per cent have never heard the term 'spam'
- More than a fifth of respondents do not know how to tackle online risks

Will Smith, AOL's safety and security expert, said: "Some of the terms being bandied around are more suitable for a computer programmers convention than for people who want to go online at home. If Internet users can't understand the language used to describe these risks, they are going to find it hard to protect themselves from being ripped off."

"We believe that the best approach to online safety and security is to help Internet users recognise the threats and how to prevent them. We do this by providing extensive information to our customers, as well as software safeguards."

Once respondents were given a plain English definition of terms such as phishing and spyware, the majority were easily able to understand the issue at hand, confirming that part of the solution is avoiding geeky jargon and providing clear definitions of the risks.

However, a quarter of those claiming to know what spyware is, were not actually able to identify the correct definition, with almost 1 in 10 (9 per cent) guessing that it is specialist software to keep an eye on unfaithful partners.

It is hardly surprising that people are becoming increasingly confused when it comes to Internet jargon, with new terms being introduced all the time. In the last few weeks, 'pharming' and 'keylogging' have entered the parlance, the latter hitting the headlines in reports about the attempted multi-million

pound robbery from a large Japanese bank.

The AOL 'Do you speak geek?' study, conducted among 1,000 UK adults of whom more than half were Internet users, shows that the picture is even worse among non-Internet users, potentially discouraging them from taking the Internet plunge. A fifth of all respondents admitted that they would not know how to tackle risks on the Internet. With always-on broadband connections more vulnerable to certain threats, it is even more crucial that users understand how to avoid them.

The research was commissioned in support of the launch of the AOL Safety & Security Centre, which provides safety and security tools, features and advice in one place on the AOL service. Further details can be found at www.aol.co.uk/simplysafer

AOL's top tips for staying safer online

1. Make the most of spam controls to reduce the number of junk emails you receive
2. Use firewall protection, which acts as a protective barrier between your computer and the Internet
3. Take advantage of anti-virus software that scans your emails, attachments, downloads and files to help guard against viruses, Trojans and other invaders
4. Use anti-spyware tools to help speed up your computer and protect your privacy
5. Avoid phishing and other online scams by thinking before you click on any links and never giving out your personal details to unknown sources online

AOL Jargonbuster

Firewall – Firewall software helps to protect your computer or home network against hackers who might try to access your account without your authority

Keylogging – Fraudsters use a piece of software or hardware to monitor keystrokes on a computer, enabling them to gather passwords, credit card numbers, and other private details

Pharming – Fraudsters redirect large numbers of Internet users from legitimate to fake Web sites

Phishing – Fraudulent emails and pop-ups designed to fool you into revealing personal information, such as passwords, credit card details, and account numbers, for criminal gain

Rogue dialler – A software application that can install itself on your computer and change your settings to dial a premium rate telephone number for Internet access, resulting in larger-than-expected phone bills

Spam – Unsolicited emails, often offering products or services in which you have no interest

Spyware – Small programmes that secretly monitor the Web sites you visit, potentially violating your privacy and causing computer slowdowns

Trojan – A virus disguised as a harmless programme, such as a downloadable game

Virus – A malicious computer programme designed to damage your data, usually spread via infected email attachments

-Ends-

Notes to Editors:

About the survey

The research was conducted by Populus on behalf of AOL UK in March 2005. Populus conducted telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,007 adults aged 18+ living in the UK, including home Internet users and non-Internet users. Populus is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. For more information about Populus, please visit www.populuslimited.com

About AOL

AOL is the leading online interactive services provider to the UK, with more than 2.3 million members, including more than 725,000 on AOL Broadband. AOL offers a range of online interactive services in the UK, including flat-rate, broadband and mobile, as well as unrivalled content and community for all the family.

Members spend more than one hour a day online on average, enjoying access to AOL's 24 channels of online content, from Entertainment and News to Parenting, Shopping and Money, as well as email and the Internet. All AOL members in the UK have access to freephone customer support.

The AOL service is provided to UK subscribers by AOL Europe Services SARL, a company in the AOL group based in Luxembourg. AOL (UK) Limited is part of AOL Europe, a business unit of America Online Inc., which is the world's leading interactive services company with more than 28 million members worldwide. America Online Inc. is a division of Time Warner Inc., a leading media and entertainment company, whose businesses include interactive services, cable systems, filmed entertainment, television networks and publishing.