Nigerian BEC Scammer Sentenced to Prison in US

A Nigerian national was sentenced this week to four years and one month in prison in the US for his role in a business email compromise (BEC) fraud scheme.

The man, Solomon Ekunke Okpe, 31, of Lagos, participated in multiple BEC, credit card, work-from-home, check-cashing, and romance scams targeting banks, businesses, and individuals in the US and abroad, including First American Holding Company and MidFirst Bank.

The schemes, the US Department of Justice says, were "intended to cause more than a million dollars in losses to US victims".

According to the DoJ, Okpe and his co-conspirators sent out phishing emails to steal credentials and other sensitive information, hacked into online accounts, assumed fake identities and impersonated people, and trafficked and used stolen credit cards.

Posing as trusted individuals, the cybercriminals deceived banks and companies into transferring funds to bank accounts they controlled.

Posing as online employers on job websites and forums, the fraudsters claimed to hire work-from-home 'employees'. These individuals were often directed to perform actions facilitating the fraud schemes, such as creating bank and payment processing accounts, cashing/depositing counterfeit checks, and transferring/withdrawing money.

Okpe and other participants in the scheme also conducted romance fraud, creating accounts on dating websites and

engaging with individuals under fictitious identities, and then asking the intended victims to transfer money overseas or to receive proceeds from wire-transfer scams.

Arrested in Malaysia, Okpe was detained there for more than two years, contesting the extradition to the US.

Last week, Johnson Uke Obogo, one of Okpe’s co-conspirators, was sentenced to one year and one day in prison for his role in related fraud schemes. Obogo was arrested in the UK.

Okpe and Obogo were extradited to the US in 2022. In December, both pleaded guilty to wire, bank, and mail fraud charges.

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