

FTC and Florida Charge Tech Support Operation with Tricking Consumers Into Paying Millions for Bogus Services

FOR RELEASE

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The FTC and State of Florida have taken action against defendants who ran an international tech support operation and allegedly misrepresented to consumers that malware or hackers had compromised their computers and that the operation was associated with or certified by Microsoft and Apple to fix their computers. A federal court **has temporarily shut down** the defendants' operation, frozen their assets, and placed control of the businesses with a court-appointed receiver.

The complaint alleges that defendants, based in Florida, Iowa, Nevada, and Canada, relied on a combination of deceptive online ads and misleading, high-pressure sales tactics to frighten consumers into spending hundreds of dollars for dubious computer "repairs" and antivirus software.

"Scammers like these use incredibly deceptive tactics that make consumers think they are receiving warnings from legitimate technology companies," said Jessica Rich, director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection. "We are proud to work with the Florida Attorney General's Office to put an end to these fraudulent practices."

According to the complaint, the defendants caused consumers' computers to display advertisements designed to resemble security alerts from Microsoft or Apple. These ads warned consumers that their computers could be infected with malware and urged them to call a toll-free number in the ad to safeguard both their computer and sensitive personal information stored on it.

According to the complaint, consumers who called the numbers in these ads were routed to the defendants' call center in Boynton Beach, Fla., where telemarketers purported to run a series of "diagnostics" that inevitably discovered the existence of grave problems that must be immediately fixed at a cost of \$200 to \$300 by one of the defendants' "certified" technicians. The defendants also frequently told consumers that they needed to spend an additional \$200 to \$500 to replace their existing antivirus software, which the defendants always claimed was outdated and ineffective. The complaint notes that consumers can acquire this software for a fraction of the cost charged by the defendants. In many instances, the software sold by the defendants to consumers with Apple computers is available as a free download.

The defendants in the case are BigDog Solutions LLC (doing business as Help Desk National and Help Desk Global); PC Help Desk US LLC (doing business as Help Desk National and Help Desk Global); Inbound Call Specialist LLC; BlackOpteck CE Inc.; 9138242 Canada

Corporation; Digital Growth Properties, LLC; Christopher J. Costanza (doing business as CJM Consulting, LLC); Suzanne W. Harris; Muzaffar Abbas; Gary Oberman; Donald Dolphin and Justin Powers.

The defendants are charged with violations of the FTC Act, the Telemarketing Sales Rule, and the Florida Unfair and Deceptive Trade Practices Act. The FTC and State of Florida are seeking to permanently stop the alleged illegal practices and obtain refunds for the victimized businesses.

The FTC has taken numerous law enforcement actions against tech support operations since 2010, shutting down the scams and collecting substantial consumer redress. The FTC has extensive [consumer education materials about tech support scams](#), including a new video.

The Commission vote authorizing the staff to file the complaint was 3-0. The complaint was filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. The court entered the temporary restraining order on June 28, 2016.

NOTE: The Commission files a complaint when it has “reason to believe” that the law has been or is being violated and it appears to the Commission that a proceeding is in the public interest. The case will be decided by the court.

The Federal Trade Commission works to promote competition, and [protect and educate consumers](#). You can [learn more about consumer topics](#) and file a [consumer complaint online](#) or by calling 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357). Like the FTC on [Facebook](#), follow us on [Twitter](#), read our [blogs](#) and [subscribe to press releases](#) for the latest FTC news and resources.