

FAKE CALLS FROM MICROSOFT

A few months ago, I received a phone call on a Saturday morning with shocking news. The caller said he represented Microsoft tech support, and they noticed that my computer had been compromised by some type of malware. “Oh my!”

Except the caller wasn’t from Microsoft, but from a scamming “boiler room” in a distant land. I played along for a few minutes, pretending to be *verklemt* and worried that my files had been hacked, my disk drive would spin out of control, and my printer could jettison its cyan ink cartridge at any moment.



I knew this was a fake call. But if I didn’t, then here’s what would have probably happened:



1. First, he would have me log into their website and download a program that would allow him to gain control of my computer.
2. The scammer would then open several arcane Windows log files, pointing out the many warnings and errors in the list. (These are perfectly normal. For example, if you ask Windows to get a file from the DVD drive and there’s no disk, you’ll find that logged as an error.)
3. The scammer would then confirm that, yes indeed, my computer is infected with an insidious program. But, to my relief, he could remove the malware right away, and offer me a maintenance plan that would ensure I’d never fall victim to such treachery.
4. The price would be \$99.95 for a one-time fix, or \$199.95 for three years’ service, or \$299.95 for life. (I wasn’t sure if it was his lifetime or mine—or the computer’s.)

I told him I knew his “offer” was a scam, and he hung up.

The bottom line: Microsoft does not monitor your computer, and does not make unsolicited phone calls telling you your computer has become infected. If someone calls you, unsolicited, claiming to be from Microsoft, hang up.

While we’re at it, here’s a list of other phone scams you need to know about (these are actual scams):

1. The IRS calls you claiming you owe back taxes of \$5,623.43, that the police are on their way to arrest you, and that you’ll spend the next 47 years in prison unless you go to the nearest Walmart and send the IRS a MoneyGram right now.

2. The electric company calls you threatening to cut off your electricity unless you pay \$823.12 in the form of iTunes gift cards, which you can easily purchase at the nearest Walmart.
3. Your grandson Timmy calls from the jailhouse in Bayonne asking for \$5000 to bail him out of jail. If that happens, tell Timmy to call his mom because you're at the Walmart buying iTunes cards so your lights don't get turned off.

If you have questions about your computer, cell phone, tablet, digital camera, or other digital gadgets, stop by the PSRC computer lap on Tuesdays from 1 to 4 p.m. or Friday from 10 a.m. until noon.