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Outsmart a phisher: New campaign urges internet users to take action against phishers. Install the Safeonweb app and you always have up-to-date information in your pocket

On 16 November, the Centre for Cybersecurity Belgium (CCB), Febelfin and the Cyber Security Coalition will launch a striking awareness campaign about the dangers of phishing: *Outsmart a phisher*. This type of online scam is on the rise and continues to claim countless victims, both private individuals and companies and organisations. The CCB receives an average of 12,000 suspicious messages from the public every day and warns of major phishing campaigns via the new Safeonweb app.

- *The awareness-raising campaign Outsmart phishers is the result of close cooperation between the Centre for Cybersecurity Belgium (CCB), Febelfin and the Cyber Security Coalition.*
- *With the holiday season approaching, this awareness-raising campaign aims to increase internet users' vigilance and provide tips on how to avoid falling into the trap of scammers who send phishing messages.*
- *As an internet user, you are not powerless. There are 2 smart things you can definitely do:*
 - *Download the Safeonweb app. This brand new app alerts you to cyber threats and new phishing messages.*
 - *Always forward fraudulent messages to suspicious@safeonweb.be. The CCB will have the suspicious links in these messages blocked. In this way, less attentive Internet users are not at risk.*
- *The central message is: outsmart phishers and never share personal data, codes or passwords.*
- *You can discover how to identify phishing and what to look out for on www.safeonweb.be.*
- *The campaign will be seen and heard through numerous channels: in addition to radio ads, there will be a TV ad and a social media campaign.*

Phishing in numbers

2020:

- 7,502 victims filed a report with the police (Federal Police)
- 67,000 fraudulent transactions via phishing, for a total net amount of 34 million euros (Febelfin)
- 12% of Belgians (and 30% of young people) have never heard of phishing (Febelfin)

2021:

- 3.7 million suspicious messages sent to suspicious@safeonweb.be , 12.000 a day (CCB)
- 1.3 million suspicious links blocked (CCB)
- 25,000 redirects to a safe page per day after clicks on suspicious links (CCB)
- Over 500 partners campaigning with Safeonweb (CCB)

Societal problem

Although more and more people recognise phishing messages, the number of victims remains unnecessarily high. In 2020, the Federal Police recorded 7,502 victims of phishing. That is an increase of 204% on 2019^[i]

"The number of registered phishing victims is increasing year after year. Every local police force can testify that more and more victims of phishing are coming forward to file a report. That's why the police support the annual Safeonweb campaigns. We need more prevention than ever before to limit the number of victims," says Olivier Bogaert, Federal Computer Crime Unit.

In 2020, 67,000 fraudulent transactions were carried out via phishing, for a total net amount of 34 million euros. Moreover, 12% of Belgians have never heard of phishing. Among young people, this percentage rises to 30% (Febelfin, 2021). These numbers point to an ongoing threat to potential victims, especially with the end-of-year period just around the corner. Phishers also strike en masse on popular shopping days such as Black Friday. Their messages are tailored to current events, and are also becoming increasingly numerous and inventive.

"Phishing has grown into a societal problem, affecting more and more people and industries. Therefore, raising awareness among the general public is a must. The more people are alert to and aware of the latest practices of phishers, the more we can reduce the number of victims. That is also the real goal of this campaign and I'm pleased that we've been able to work together with the Centre for Cybersecurity Belgium, the Cyber Security Coalition and 500 committed partners on this. We will continue to work on this theme after the campaign too: an anti-phishing working group, within the CCB and with various stakeholders, will be set up to better coordinate the fight against phishing in the future," says Karel Baert, CEO of Febelfin.

Only by cooperating with governments, the police, the judiciary, the telecommunications sector, etc., can we tackle phishing. That is why the CCB, Febelfin and the Cyber Security Coalition, together with more than 500 partners, have joined forces for a new, broad-based awareness campaign that aims to inform and warn people. After all, internet users have to become more vigilant. Members of the public who are alert are extra cautious, and that is the purpose of this awareness-raising campaign.

What is phishing?

The principle is simple: you receive an e-mail, text message or social media message that wants to trick you into clicking on a link. After clicking on this link, you are asked to provide your personal details and possibly a response code (which appears on your card reader), which are then sent to the scammer. The phone is also used often: the scammers call you, try to gain your trust and persuade you to give them your bank card details and passwords. Once they have your response code, the scammers can access your account and make off with your money.

Never give out your personal codes

If you remain vigilant, these fraudulent messages and calls can be quickly recognised. To avoid falling into the trap, this campaign offers some tips. You can find out how to identify phishing and what to watch out for on www.safeonweb.be. The campaign's key message is: be on your guard if you get a suspicious message, and never share personal (response) codes or passwords. In other words: outsmart the phishers.

Forward suspicious messages to suspicious@safeonweb.be

Always forward fraudulent messages to suspicious@safeonweb.be. The CCB will then have the suspicious links in these messages blocked. This year, the CCB has already received 3.7 million suspicious messages from alert members of the public (an average of more than 12,000 per day), and as a result has reported more than 1.3 million fraudulent websites to Google and Microsoft, who have then blocked them. In addition, the CCB sends an average of 25,000 redirects to a safe page per day, after people click on suspicious links. If someone clicks on that link afterwards, they will receive a clear warning not to visit that page. In this way, we can all contribute to a safe digital environment.

Brand new app

Additionally, the campaign wants to draw attention to a brand new app that collects all the news about phishing and warns of cyber threats and new forms of online scams. It offers a quick and easy way to stay informed. The information disseminated by the app is the result of a careful analysis of the thousands of messages Safeonweb receives every day. The app also sends an alert if an infection is reported to Safeonweb on your registered Wi-Fi network. The Safeonweb app is available free of charge for iOS in the App Store and for Android in the Google Play Store. This is a unique partnership between alert members of the public and authorities that are taking quick action.

"The good news is that internet users are not powerless in the face of phishing. The Centre for Cybersecurity launched an e-mail address 4 years ago: suspicious@safeonweb.be. As many as 12,000 attentive internet users forward fraudulent messages to us every day. Then we can get to work. We identify suspicious links in these messages and send about 25,000 warnings per day to internet users who click on these links. And that's not all: we also pick out the most noteworthy from all of the messages we receive and share them via the Safeonweb app, so that even more people are on their guard! This is a unique collaboration between the general public and the government in order to outsmart the phishers," says Miguel De Bruycker, Director of the Centre for Cybersecurity Belgium.

What should you do if you have become a victim of phishing?

If you have fallen into the phishing trap, take the following steps:

- Call Card Stop immediately on 070 344 344.
- Inform your bank as soon as possible.
- Report it to the police immediately.
- Change your passwords and run a virus scan if you think you have installed malware.

Campaigning together

The aim is to appeal to the widest possible audience to make sure the campaign is heard by everyone. The campaign will be seen and heard through numerous channels: the central message will be sent out through radio commercials and the campaign will not go unnoticed on television either: actress Sien Eggers and actor Patrick Ridremont (Unité 42) will take up the fight against phishers in chivalrous style, using short clips recorded in the historic setting of Mechelen town hall. Social media will also be used to raise awareness of the dangers of phishing. All campaign material can be downloaded at <https://safeonweb.be/en/campaign-material>

"Phishing is also still a major problem in the corporate world. Therefore I recommend organisations to definitely make use of these free materials to arm their employees, customers and professional contacts against phishing." Jan De Blauwe, Chair, Cyber Security Coalition

"We are very grateful to all our partners who have joined us in supporting the campaign message. Federal government departments, academic institutions, large and small companies, as well as non-profit organisations and others, support the campaign. Like last year, more than 500 partners will be helping to distribute the campaign materials." Phédra Clouner, Deputy Director of the CCB.

More information?

Do not hesitate to contact the Centre for Cybersecurity Belgium or Febelfin for more information:

- Centre for Cybersecurity Belgium: Katrien Eggers via Katrien.eggers@cert.be or 0485765336
- Febelfin: Isabelle Marchand via press@febelfin.be or 02/507.68.31

[i] http://www.stat.policefederale.be/assets/pdf/crimestat/nationaal/rapport_2021_trim1_nat_belgie_nl.pdf

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