Publication: De Rebus
Date: Thursday, November 01, 2018
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Fraud syndicates use public data to access their victim's details

The Fiduciary Institute of Southern Africa (FISA) held its eighth annual conference themed 'Privacy, protection and disclosure in an online world.' The conference was held in Johannesburg on 20 September. Head of ENSAfrica's Forensics department, Steven Powell, presented on identity theft and abuse of information in fraud and corruption. He said when fraud syndicates want to access one's information, they look for information on a public data platform, such as –

- property details, which they can obtain from a Deeds office;
- company's information, which they can access at the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC); and
- credit checks on the individual they are targeting.

Mr Powell pointed out that often fraud syndicates target call centre employees and persuade them to work with them, promising them money and a better life. He added that in 2010 the retail industry was hit hard by card cloning fraud. He said fraud syndicates worked with cashiers during the 2010 FIFA World Cup tournament, which was hosted in South Africa (SA), at various stores to clone credit cards belonging to foreigners. He pointed out that some retail stores lost between R 200 000 and R 300 000 a week during that time.

Mr Powell said another area where data is mostly exploited are Gmail accounts. He added that syndicates can easily access Gmail accounts and warned that when users send important, sensitive information they should use password protected documents. He said that syndicates also target companies during the tax season. Syndicates create false companies and claim they are directors of that particular company and change the banking details of that company. They then send a notice to the bank with a letter confirmed by the CIPC to change the banking details and then send another letter to South African Revenue Service (Sars) notifying them about the new banking details. Sars would then pay tax returns into the new account belonging to the fraud syndicate thinking they had paid the correct directors of that particular company.

Head of ENSAfrica's Forensics department, Steven Powell, presented on identity theft and abuse of information in fraud and corruption at the Fiduciary Institute of Southern Africa conference held in Johannesburg.

Mr Powell pointed out that syndicates can access and change information on salary slips, bank statements, death certificates, marriage certificates or identification documents and use it to commit fraud. He warned that people should be careful how they handle important documents and should know how to dispose of garbage that might have any information syndicates can use to access important information.

Dealing with conflicts of interest

Member of the South African Chapter of the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners and part time lecturer at the University of Pretoria, Doctor Janette Minnaar-van Veijeren, said professionals in various industries are held to high standards, with legal implications set for these professionals. She added that there are values and ethical norms for