

## The New Zealand chatbots designed to scam the scammers

### Level 3 • Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

What is cybercrime? Provide some examples.

#### 2 Key words

Find key words in the article and write them next to the definitions below. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. an organization that works to stop people from doing illegal things in a particular area of business or society  
\_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
2. the practice of tricking someone into revealing personal information, such as passwords and credit card numbers, by sending them an email that seems to be from a reputable company  
\_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
3. dishonest plans, especially for getting money \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
4. particular qualities in someone's character \_\_\_\_\_ (para 6)
5. good at judging situations and people quickly and able to use this knowledge for personal benefit  
\_\_\_\_\_ (para 7)
6. treating other people badly for your own benefit \_\_\_\_\_ (para 8)
7. easily influenced or affected by something \_\_\_\_\_ (para 9)
8. knowing a lot about something and able to make good judgements about it  
\_\_\_\_\_ (para 9)
9. using more words and taking more time than necessary to say something \_\_\_\_\_ (para 10)
10. harmless \_\_\_\_\_ (para 10)
11. coming from a particular local area \_\_\_\_\_ (para 12)
12. pretending to be someone else by copying the way that they speak or behave  
\_\_\_\_\_ (para 13)

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#### 'Do you do a bingo night?': the New Zealand chatbots designed to scam the scammers

*Internet watchdog uses artificial-intelligence bot to engage foreign scammers in long-winded email conversations*

**Eleanor Ainge Roy**

**10 November, 2017**

- 1 Thousands of online scammers around the globe are being fooled by artificial-intelligence bots posing as New Zealanders and created by the country's internet watchdog to protect it from "phishing" scams.
- 2 Chatbots that use distinct New Zealand slang such as "aye" have been deployed by Netsafe in a bid to engage scammers in protracted email exchanges that waste their time, gather intelligence and lure them away from actual victims.
- 3 Cybercrime costs New Zealanders around NZ\$250m annually. Computer programmers at Netsafe spent more than a year designing the bots as part of their Re:scam initiative, which went live in November, 2017.
- 4 Within 24 hours, 6,000 scam emails had been sent to the Re:scam email address and there were 1,000 active conversations taking place between scammers and chatbots.
- 5 So far, the longest exchange between a scammer and a chatbot pretending to be a New Zealander was 20 emails long.
- 6 The bots use humour, grammatical errors and local slang to make their "personas" believable, said Netsafe CEO Martin Cocker. As the program engages in more fake conversations with scammers abroad, its vocabulary, intelligence and personality traits will grow.
- 7 Cocker says if the scammers aren't astute or paying attention, the exchanges could go on for a "very, very long time".
- 8 "We are really concerned about the growth of predatory email phishing, while victims remain essentially powerless," said Cocker.
- 9 "Everyone is susceptible to online phishing schemes and no matter how tech savvy you are, scammers are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Re:scam will adapt as the scammers adapt their techniques, collecting data that will help us to keep up and protect more people across New Zealand."
- 10 Cocker said Netsafe had designed a bot that was as convincing and long-winded as possible, asking scammers a seemingly never-ending series of benign questions.
- 11 "Dear Illuminati, what a wonderful surprise," wrote a Re:scam chatbot responding to a scammer offering \$5m. "I'd love to join your secret club. Do you do a bingo night?"  
"There is not bingo night," replied the scammer. "Please complete attached form with bank details for your receive full payments of 5 million."  
"Terrific!" replied the Re:scam chatbot. "But to avoid detection I am going to send my bank details through one number at a time. Ready? 4 ..."  
"That is not nessasary," replied the scammer.  
"7," said the bot.
- 12 Cocker says the bot works particularly well because New Zealand isn't targeted by any home-grown scammers – only those targeting the country from abroad.
- 13 "The bot does a pretty good job of impersonating how many New Zealanders would engage with scammers. It is fairly well developed in terms of its phrasing, language and approach so it is quite realistic," said Cocker.

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First published in *The Guardian*, 10/11/17

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#### 3 Comprehension check

Answer the questions using information from the text.

1. Who set up the Re:scam initiative and why did they set it up?
2. How does it work?
3. How will it continually improve?

#### 4 Adverbs

a. Complete the quotes from Martin Cocker using the adverbs from the text.

1. victims remain \_\_\_\_\_ powerless
2. asking scammers a \_\_\_\_\_ never-ending series of benign questions
3. the bot does a \_\_\_\_\_ good job
4. it is \_\_\_\_\_ well developed
5. it is \_\_\_\_\_ realistic

b. Discuss the meanings of the words in each gap and how they alter the meanings of the quotes. Think of synonyms for each of the words.

#### 5 Scammer and chatbot email conversation

a. Read an actual email conversation between a scammer and a chatbot. Put the email exchanges in order.

The scammer's initial email (which you don't have here) arrives first and is then followed by email numbers ...

\_\_\_\_\_

b. Discuss what you would expect the scammer's initial email to say.


c. Check your answers and read the whole conversation at the following link.

[www.scribd.com/document/364009377/Rescam-Beneficiary-Scam-Conversation#fullscreen&from\\_embed](http://www.scribd.com/document/364009377/Rescam-Beneficiary-Scam-Conversation#fullscreen&from_embed)


d. Correct the English in the scammer's emails.

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 1


In order to keep the costs down maybe I could have a stab at the lawyer stuff? I don't have any "education" so to speak but could probably just Google my way through it aye. Save us both a bit of money.

 2

I put all that info in an attachment in the last email but the email went a long way so maybe it got detached somewhere in transit? We'll try again. Check attachment.

 3


Include your full postal address please.

 4

Hello


Please contact my late husband lawyer, he will assist you till the funds get into your account even if you don't want to visit Spain, you can also transfer it into your accounts without any problem, it will only take me 2 days to get everything ready for you. Thanks for your understanding. Here is the things he needs from you, for the changing of beneficiary in your name

- your full name
- your full address
- your age
- your occupation
- your telephone number
- your identity card number, driving licence number or international passport number

 5

Hey there.

Thanks for getting in touch. I'm sorry to hear about your late husband. I struggle with punctuality myself and I know how irritating it can be. This sounds like new territory for me aye. Before we get the lawyers involved, would it be a good idea for me to get some legal advice?


 6

There was no attachment attached to your email. It is important that we do not run out of time.

Please if you don't want to accomplish my wish, try and let me know so that I will seek for another person that will do it for me, take care and hope to reach from you soon.

For your changing of beneficiary in your name I need you to send me

- your full name
- your full address
- your age
- your occupation
- your telephone number
- your identity card number, driving licence number or international passport number


 7

Current postal address or the new address? Did I tell you I was moving? We fell out with the landlord. Apparently we're not allowed to have indoor plants in the attic, it's a fire hazard.

 8

Hello again.

Postal or residential?

 9

Thanks very much my dear for hearing from you that you have contacted my late husband lawyer and please I am advising you to comply with him because he is the one that will help you to get the fund from the security firm in Spain without any problem take care and remains bless.

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#### 6 Discussion

- How often do you receive scam emails?
- Have you, or has anyone you know, ever fallen for an online scam?
- What do you do to protect yourself from cybercrime?

#### 7 Video

Watch a video about how Re:scam works.

[www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=139&v=jPajqAJWiNA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=139&v=jPajqAJWiNA)

#### 8 Webquest

Find out more about the Netsafe organization and their work.

[www.netsafe.org.nz](http://www.netsafe.org.nz)

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#### KEY

#### 1 Warmer

Cybercrime is crime committed using the internet.

##### Some examples

Identity theft – stealing information about someone that makes it possible to use their bank account or credit card

Advance-fee fraud – cheating victims out of money by promising them an eventual huge payoff, or a product or service that never materializes

Hacking – using a computer to connect to someone else's computer secretly and often illegally so that you can find or change information on it

Cyberstalking – using the internet or other electronic means to stalk or harass someone

#### 2 Key words

1. watchdog
2. phishing
3. scams
4. traits
5. astute
6. predatory
7. susceptible
8. savvy
9. long-winded
10. benign
11. home-grown
12. impersonating

#### 3 Comprehension check

1. Netsafe, an organization that works to provide online safety in New Zealand; Cybercrime costs New Zealanders around NZ\$250m each year and everyone is susceptible.
2. Chatbots engage scammers in protracted email exchanges that waste their time, gather intelligence and lure them away from actual victims.

3. Re:scam will adapt their techniques and continue to collect data in order to keep up with the scammers. The software is continually learning so the more conversations a chatbot has, the quicker it improves its vocabulary, intelligence and 'personality'.

#### 4 Adverbs

##### a.

1. essentially
2. seemingly
3. pretty
4. fairly
5. quite

##### b. (definitions and possible synonyms)

1. used for saying that something is mostly true but not completely true – practically
2. appearing to have a particular quality, even though this is probably not true – apparently
3. fairly (can also mean *very*, depending on context)
4. to some degree but not completely or extremely – quite
5. fairly

#### 5 Scammer and chatbot email conversation

##### a.

- 5, 9, 1, 4, 2, 6, 8, 3, 7