

The New Zealand chatbots designed to scam the scammers

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

1 Warmer

What is cybercrime? Give some examples.

2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then, find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

astute
phishing

bots
predatory

fooled by
savvy

impersonating
scams

long-winded
susceptible

lure away
watchdog

1. tricked into believing something _____ (para 1)
2. computer programs that work automatically and can interact with people _____ (para 1)
3. an organization that works to stop people from doing illegal things in a particular area of business or society _____ (para 1)
4. 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 reliable company _____ (para 1)
5. dishonest plans, especially for getting money _____ (para 1)
6. tempt someone to do something else instead of the thing they were doing _____ (para 2)
7. good at judging situations and people quickly and able to use this knowledge for personal benefit _____ (para 7)
8. treating other people badly for your own benefit _____ (para 8)
9. easily influenced or affected by something _____ (para 9)
10. knowing a lot about something and able to make good judgements about it _____ (para 9)
11. using more words and taking more time than necessary to say something _____ (para 10)
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

Eleanor Ainge Roy

10 November, 2017

- 1 Thousands of online scammers around the world are being fooled by artificial-intelligence bots pretending to be New Zealanders. The bots were created by the country's internet watchdog to protect it from "phishing" scams.
- 2 Chatbots that use New Zealand slang such as "aye" are being used by Netsafe to try to get scammers involved in long email exchanges that waste their time, collect intelligence and lure them away from actual victims.
- 3 Cybercrime costs New Zealanders around NZ\$250m a year. 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 themselves sound believable, said Netsafe CEO Martin Cocker. As the program gets involved in more fake conversations with scammers abroad, its vocabulary, intelligence and personality 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," 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 friendly 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 scammers from its own country – it is only targeted from abroad.
- 13 "The bot does a pretty good job of impersonating how many New Zealanders would write to scammers. It is fairly well developed in its phrasing, language and approach so it is quite realistic," said Cocker.

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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 Using the key words

a. Complete these sentences with some of the key words from task 2.

1. She's an _____ observer of human behaviour.
2. That new restaurant opposite is trying to _____ our customers.
3. My mum is very computer _____ for her age.
4. Don't be _____ the so-called experts. They just want you to buy the product.
5. The young man was sent to prison for _____ a police officer.
6. The bank warned its customers not to open emails with the subject line 'Your account'. These are phishing _____.
7. Mr Smith is always so _____ on the phone. That's why I prefer to contact him by email.
8. The area around my parents' house is very _____ to flooding.

b. Use these or other key words from task 2 in sentences of your own.

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


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

8 Webquest

Find out more about the Netsafe organization and their work.

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

Note: It's not necessary for students to know the words for these types of crimes. They can just describe them.

2 Key words

1. fooled by
2. bots
3. watchdog
4. phishing
5. scams
6. lure away
7. astute
8. predatory
9. susceptible
10. savvy
11. long-winded
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 Using the key words

1. astute
2. lure away
3. savvy
4. fooled by
5. impersonating
6. scams
7. long-winded
8. susceptible

5 Scammer and chatbot email conversation

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