

Consumers warned of email hacking for bank account details

Customers must prevent criminals from hacking into their email accounts to obtain bank account information or issue illicit instructions to their banks, the South African Banking Risk Information Centre (Sabric) has warned.



Kalyani Pillay, chief executive of Sabric says Internet users must be vigilant and guard their e-mail accounts, particularly those on sites such as Gmail and Yahoo. Image: SA Reserve Bank

While no statistics are available, Sabric is seeing an increasing trend of email hacking where criminals illegally access email accounts and then communicate as if they are the account holder.

Sabric's chief executive Kalyani Pillay said criminals used information from email accounts to build a profile of the account holder, which was a form of identity theft.

Criminals steal user names and passwords through phishing or tricking people into disclosing their details.

"The most targeted emails were free accounts, such as Gmail and Yahoo," said Pillay.

"The problem with cyber crime is that it is sophisticated, anonymous and borderless, making it difficult to fight," she said. "Certain violent crimes are peculiar to particular countries, but cybercrime is everywhere," Pillay added.

She said that up-to-date, relevant legislation was needed to effectively fight cybercrime.

According to Pillay, government is considering various pieces of legislation, but "ideally we would want more to be done".

In June 2012, South Africa had 8.5m Internet users and in December that year had over 6m users of social media.

A 2013 report by multinational security software company Norton found that South Africa had the third-highest number of cyber crime victims, after Russia and China.

Sabiric warned account holders to beware of messages saying the account was full and the user must click on a link provided to delete messages or inbox size.

Other hoax emails might tell users that due to congestion, some accounts are being closed and to retain the email account, the users must log on using the link provided.

Pillay recommended that account holders regularly check their sent items to ensure no one was sending messages from their account.

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