Subex Telecom Fraud Alerts

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GSMA to review claims regarding unraveling of GSM voice based encryption algorithm

- GSMA is set to review the claims made by encryption expert Karsten Nohl that he was able to unravel the GSM A5/1 algorithm – the primary encryption algorithm used to protect mobile phone conversations from eavesdroppers, which was first adopted by the GSM community in 1988.
- Although the A5/1 algorithm will eventually be rendered obsolete with the increasing adoption of 3G and 4G technologies, many telcos still use the A5/1 algorithm today.
- The claims have not yet been confirmed and GSMA is planning to investigate further to gauge the extent of the threat.

**Source: Total Telecom, Jan 2010*

Continuous customer education helps curb fraud

Although the problem has been widespread and well understood for many years, the recent rise in social engineering and phishing attacks have prompted one leading operator in India to explicitly warn mobile users from answering any suspicious calls or divulging any personal information. In this case the callers receive a missed call from a number starting with +92. Upon returning the missed call the user is greeted by a fraudster pretending to be a representative of the operator. The fraudster then informs the customer of having won an operator sponsored lottery and tries to con them into revealing sensitive personal information and pay a commission to receive the winnings.

Operators should be proactive in keeping their customers informed, in order to minimize the impact of such fraudulent activities.

**Source: Indiatimes Infotech, Jan 2010*

Subliminal SMS problem

The last couple of months have seen renewed interest in 'Subliminal SMSs' being sent by mobile handsets. This is not necessarily a form of fraud or even malicious behavior; it can however cause concern to customers and confusion within operators. There are many variants of the problem, two of the most common being:

1. Subliminal SMSs sent from handsets to the handset manufacturer containing measurement data, error reports, etc. e.g. Nokia and Ericsson handsets have reportedly done this in the past
2. Subliminal s/w registration or certification messages being sent from a handset to the s/w licensor e.g. Samsung handsets equipped with VeriSign.

Some common traits of Subliminal SMSs is that they are sent by specific handset types, they are sent to a small number of dedicated B-numbers, and they are (or at least should be) transparent to the customer and non-billable.