

Over \$2.5m lost in 'telco staff' scam cases

FROM B1

ports made between January and November this year, according to latest figures provided by the police.

New scams have also been on the

rise in recent months, including cases where callers impersonated technical support staff.

Police said over \$2.5 million has been lost to this type of scam where the culprits impersonate Singtel staff, in 42 reported incidents in Au-

gust and September.

Victims were told that there were issues with their modem or Internet connection.

They were then asked to download and install software applications such as TeamViewer or AnyDesk onto their computers, on the pretext that this would allow the Singtel "staff" to resolve the issues.

The scammers would then ask the victims to log into their online bank accounts as they accessed their computers remotely.

The scammers would then trans-

fer funds out of the victims' bank accounts without their consent.

In another type of scam, 32 people lost at least \$135,000 between February and November after responding to unsolicited text messages offering loans, according to new figures from the police.

Once the victims responded to the text messages, the scammers would typically send them documents purportedly from the Ministry of Law and/or Monetary Authority of Singapore, claiming that they are required to pay a deposit and 7 per cent goods and services tax before

the loans can be approved.

When the victims declined to pay, the scammers would harass them by claiming that the loans have already been approved and a processing fee would have to be paid to cancel the loans.

Dr Mohamed Elmie Nekmat from the Media Literacy Council said that Singaporeans might fall prey to such scams "due to the general trust in certain sources... On social media, this could be a person they know or a brand they are familiar with".

"It is hard to say that the emer-

gence of these new types of scams are because Singaporeans are less savvy online," he added.

They should be more cautious when they shop online, said the assistant professor in communications and new media at the National University of Singapore.

He added: "Education is always the way to go to prevent more people from becoming scam victims, but technology companies should also introduce measures to reduce the vulnerability of their users."

ngxtc@sph.com.sg



TTSH senior therapy assistants Poh Kiat Hong (left) and Cindy Quek demonstrating the car transfer training with a decommissioned ComfortDelGro taxi. For caregivers, it involves learning the proper technique of positioning and then lifting or helping patients with mobility issues into the vehicle. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

Old cab gets new life in rehabilitation of TTSH patients

Caregivers also use it to learn to help those with mobility issues get into cars

Wong Kai Yi

The blue ComfortDelGro Hyundai Sonata looks just like any other taxi, but it hides a secret.

Pop the bonnet and there is no engine underneath.

After years of ferrying passengers, this taxi is headed for more years of service – of a different kind.

Instead of being scrapped – the norm for all cabs reaching the end of their statutory lifespan of 10 years – it will be donated to Tan Tock Seng Hospital's (TTSH) Ng Teng Fong Centre for Healthcare Innovation.

There, it will be used for car transfer training for patients with mobility issues and their caregivers.

Patients who need rehabilitation for conditions such as stroke, spinal cord injury or those with prosthetic legs will benefit from this programme, ComfortDelGro said.

For caregivers, transfer training involves learning the proper technique of positioning and then lifting or helping the patients into the vehicle.

Such training is currently done through simulations or in the hospital wards, which is not very realistic, said Ms Florence Cheong, 43, head of the occupational therapy department at TTSH.

Trying to simulate something like a vehicle's low ceiling is difficult.

With the donated taxi, training

can now be conducted more realistically and many times before the patient is discharged, Ms Cheong said.

Every day, some two to four patients at TTSH have to learn how to get into a car, adding up to more than 1,000 each year, she added.

ComfortDelGro has been donating taxis to such causes since 1999, starting with its Toyota Crown cabs, and progressing to Hyundai Sonatas as it transitions from diesel to petrol-electric hybrids like the Toyota Prius.

It has so far donated 27 Crown and Sonata cabs – worth over \$90,000 – on request to hospitals and schools for rehabilitation or educational purposes.

Introduced in 2007, the Sonata forms a shrinking portion of ComfortDelGro's current fleet of 11,000 cabs.

With the new set-up, occupational therapists can better demonstrate safety tips and assess how patients and caregivers are learning, ComfortDelGro said.

Donated taxis are decommissioned in a process that requires approval by the Land Transport Authority (LTA).

First, the taxi is towed to ComfortDelGro's workshop in Sin Ming Drive to have its engine and ancillaries removed, fluids like engine oil and coolant drained, and advertisements stripped out.

Once LTA has approved the de-

commissioning, the taxi's original licence plate is replaced by a brown one to indicate it is no longer in service.

It is then sent to vehicle inspection firm Vicom to ensure it has been properly decommissioned.

The final touch involves wrapping the taxi with special decals denoting it as a gift.

"TTSH has been developing various technologies to help rehabilitate our patients – from robotics to virtual and augmented reality – but it is important for our patients and their caregivers to be familiarised with real-world environments in a safe way to help them to recover their mobility and regain confidence," said its chief executive, Dr Eugene Soh, 45.

"We hope to support our patients to get ready for life outside of the hospital so that they may remain active and not homebound."

TTSH will soon get a decommissioned single-deck SBS Transit bus which, together with the taxi, will be part of the mobility circuit at the future Integrated Care Hub next to the hospital.

Wheelchair user Janetta Tan, 29, whose caregiver is her sister, said that the car transfer training made them confident of taking a taxi, which is convenient when rushing for appointments and on rainy days.

kaiyiw@sph.com.sg

Jail, fine for man who recorded upskirt video

Shaffiq Alkhatib
Court Correspondent

An education centre teacher placed his mobile phone on his briefcase and recorded an upskirt video of a 25-year-old woman on an MRT train.

Japanese national Shohei Yamamoto, 33, fled when the woman caught him red-handed but was caught after the police were called.

The authorities later found 30 obscene films in his possession after checking his mobile phone and laptop computer. Some showed "kinky sadistic sex".

Yesterday, Yamamoto was sentenced in a district court to 24 days' jail and a fine of \$15,000, after pleading guilty to one count each of insulting a woman's modesty and possessing obscene films.

The Straits Times understands he is no longer employed by the education centre, whose name was not given in court documents.

The upskirt video was taken on June 29, the court heard.

Yamamoto had boarded the train at Potong Pasir station at around 9.40am.

When he spotted the Singaporean woman, he moved towards her and recorded the clip.

The train was approaching Dhoby Ghaut station when she felt something brushing against her left calf and spotted the phone on his briefcase.

The court heard that he took off when she confronted him after they got off the train.

She reported the matter to a station master who called the police.

Yamamoto was arrested soon after and he admitted recording the upskirt video, which he deleted before he was nabbed.

His electronic devices were seized and the authorities found the obscene films in them.

For insulting the woman's modesty, he could have been jailed for up to a year and fined.

ashaffiq@sph.com.sg

The authorities later found 30 obscene films in his possession after checking his mobile phone and laptop computer.

itham@sph.com.sg

TPG extends 4G trial as rivals prepare for 5G battle

Irene Tham
Tech Editor

Singapore's fourth telco TPG Telecom has extended its free trial for 300,000 subscribers, with a 4G commercial launch being pushed to some time next year.

TPG's commercial launch was widely expected to be this month as the one-year trial for its first batch of customers would have ended on Dec 20.

But the telco wants to iron out all coverage and performance issues on its 4G network first, TPG country general manager Richard Tan told The Straits Times.

"The original intention of the trial remains: to validate the quality and

coverage of our network," he said, referring to surfing speeds and coverage blind spots.

"We are deeply committed to bringing innovation to the market and plan to launch commercially in 2020," he added.

Explaining the delayed commercial launch, Opsignal vice-president of analysis Ian Fogg said: "TPG management will want their service to be able to compete with other Singaporean operators; it will become harder once TPG starts to charge."

TPG, which won its 4G licence here in December 2016, started registering subscribers last December in batches, offering them a free one-year trial.

It would notify customers of their

monthly charge at least two months before the end of their free trial. The trial is still ongoing and TPG has not specified a launch date.

The delay comes even as two of the three incumbent telcos – Singtel and StarHub – are preparing for the next battle here involving 5G licences.

The Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) has set the end of next month as the deadline for telcos to submit detailed business proposals before issuing licences to operate four 5G networks here.

Only two of the networks – which Singtel and StarHub confirmed they are eyeing – will have island-wide reach due to the scarcity of cer-

tain 5G airwaves.

"All telcos will vie for one of the two licences to operate a nationwide 5G network," said Mr Sachin Mittal, head of telco research at DBS Bank.

"The telcos have to future-proof their networks. There may not be many consumer applications now but what about the next five years?" said Mr Mittal.

Analysts have estimated the cumulative cost of a 5G network to be in the billions, requiring telcos to partner one another to share the costs.

StarHub, for one, is in discussions with "multiple parties" on network sharing and co-investments, said Mr Sebastian Tan, its head of 5G Centre of Excellence.

StarHub is aiming to have two licences – one for a nationwide network and one with limited coverage – to provide 5G services to the Government, businesses and consumers.

Singtel said it will be submitting proposals to win at least one licence, and it is aiming for the one with nationwide reach.

All four networks can be rolled out by next year to provide spot coverage. Nationwide coverage is possible only in 2021, when the 3.5GHz airwaves for nationwide reach become available.

MI said it is "evaluating its options" when asked about its 5G plans. Similarly, TPG's Mr Tan declined to comment on its 5G plans.

But all four telcos have already

started 5G trials to test various use cases.

For instance, TPG is working with real estate firm CapitaLand and map service provider Navinfo DataTech to test cloud-based driverless car navigation at Science Park 1 and 2 over a 5G connection.

Port operator PSA International is working with Singtel and MI to explore the use of driverless vehicles to move shipping containers round the clock over a 5G connection.

The IMDA will assess the proposals for the two nationwide networks on factors such as security design and the operators' ability to achieve 50 per cent islandwide coverage by end-2022.

itham@sph.com.sg