FBI Wants Hacker Who Helped Catch Cheating Lovers

ANNE FLAHERTY, Associated Press

WANTED
BY THE FBI

CARLOS ENRIQUE PEREZ-MELARA

Aliases: Carlos E. Perez Melara, Carlos E. Perezmelara

DESCRIPTION

Date(s) of Birth Used: April 19, 1980
Place of Birth: El Salvador
Height: 59"
Weight: 140 pounds
NCIC: W617874182
Hair: Black
Eyes: Blue
Sex: Male
Race: White (Hispanic)
Nationality: El Salvadoran

Remarks: Perez-Melara was in the United States on a travel visa and then obtained a student visa while he was taking college courses. He has ties to San Diego, California, and his last known location is San Salvador, El Salvador.

DETAILS

Carlos Enrique Perez-Melara is wanted for his alleged involvement in manufacturing spyware which was used to intercept the private communications of hundreds, if not thousands, of victims. As part of the scheme, Perez-Melara ran a website offering customers a way to "catch a cheating lover" by sending spyware masqueraded as an electronic greeting card. Victims who opened the greeting card would unwittingly install a program onto their computers. The program collected keystrokes and other incoming and outgoing electronic communications on the victims' computers. The program would periodically send e-mail messages back to the purchasers of the service containing the acquired communications, including the victims' passwords, lists of visited websites, intercepted e-mail messages, and keystroke logs. The program in question was initially called "Email PI" and renamed "Lover Spy" in July/August 2003. Perez-Melara allegedly hosted the website, as well as created the computer program. He ran the operation from his San Diego residence in 2003.

An arrest warrant was issued for Perez-Melara in the Southern District of California on July 21, 2005, after he was charged with the following crimes: manufacturing a surreptitious interception device; sending a surreptitious interception device; advertising a surreptitious interception device; unlawfully intercepting electronic communications; disclosing unlawfully intercepted electronic communications; unauthorized access to protected computer for financial gain; and aiding and abetting.

REWARD

The FBI is offering a reward of up to $50,000 for information leading to the arrest of Carlos Enrique Perez-Melara.

If you have any information concerning this person, please contact your local FBI office or the nearest American Embassy or Consulate.

Washington (AP) — Catching a cheating lover online using commercial spyware seems to be easier than nabbing the hacker behind it.

The FBI this week added to its list of most wanted cybercriminals a former San Diego college student who developed an $89 program called "Loverspy" or "Email PI." Sold online from his apartment, the program would send the suspected cheater an electronic greeting card that, if opened, would install malicious software that could capture emails and instant messages, even spy on someone using the

victim's own webcam.

Carlos Enrique Perez-Melara, 33, has eluded authorities since his July 2005 indictment. His last known whereabouts were in El Salvador, where he was born.

"These are sophisticated folks who know how to hide themselves on the Internet," John Brown, a section chief with the FBI who oversees operations in the agency's cyber division, said of Perez-Melara and creators of other "hacking-for-hire" services.

In one case earlier this year, a New York police detective was arrested for spending more than $4,000 on hacking services to obtain the emails of more than a dozen of his colleagues. Many of the operators tend to be based overseas.

The case of Perez-Melara, 33, is noteworthy because he appears to have made relatively little money on the scheme, unlike others on the FBI list who were accused of bilking millions of dollars from businesses and Internet users worldwide. But Perez-Melara, a native of El Salvador who was in the United States on a student visa in 2003 when he sold the spyware, allegedly helped turn average computer users into sophisticated hackers who could stalk their victims.

Loverspy was designed "with stealth in mind, claiming that it would be impossible to detect by 99.9 percent of users," according to a July 2005 federal indictment of Perez-Melara.

Brown said Perez-Melara was added to the FBI most wanted list in part because the former college student has been so difficult to find. The government is now offering a $50,000 reward for information leading to his arrest.

According to his indictment, Perez-Melara sold the software to 1,000 customers, who then tried to infect about 2,000 others. Victims took the bait only about half the time, the government said. People who purchased the spyware were charged with illegally intercepting electronic communications. Most of those cases appear to have resulted in probation and fines.

In addition to hacking-for-hire services, there is an established commercial market for snooping software that domestic violence advocates warn can also be used to stalk victims. Software such as ePhoneTracker and WebWatcher, for example, are advertised as ways to monitor kids' online messages and track their location. For $349 a year, Flexispy of Wilmington, Del., promises to capture every Facebook message, email, text and photo sent from a phone, as well as record phone calls. These services generally would be legal only if the person installing the software also owned the device or were given consent by the owner.

Others identified on the FBI most wanted cyber list includes Alexsey Belan, a Russian, who allegedly broke into the computer networks of three major U.S. e-commerce companies. Belan is accused of stealing the companies' user databases and encrypted passwords, which he then sold. Two others named by the FBI hijacked computers with malware disguised as online advertisements, then sold

security fixes to victims. In one case, the loss to consumers was estimated to be $100 million.

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