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Tuesday, October 30, 2007

Southgate

Illegal modem sales net suspect

Stealth devices block Internet provider addresses that police use to track criminal activity online.

Norman Sinclair / The Detroit News

SOUTHGATE -- A man accused of selling imported modems he altered to pirate online service without detection may have also provided sexual predators and other Internet criminals with stealth devices that escape police scrutiny, officials fear.

Benjamin Sturm, 27, of Southgate was arraigned in 23rd District Court in Taylor on Monday, charged with inappropriate use and sale of a telecommunications device, a four-year felony.

"While Sturm's motivation appeared to be the \$200 price he allegedly received for the modems, they provide a perfect cover for online criminals," said Wayne County Sheriff Warren Evans. "These stealth modems clearly open the door for child predators and pornographers to avoid detection and elude capture."

Advertisement

The modems are rigged to block the unique Internet provider (IP) address that can be traced to a specific user when users log onto the Internet.

Evans said deputies from the department's Internet Unit were tipped off by an investigator from a cable provider that Sturm was advertising the modems online. The sheriff said Sturm had been selling the devices for two years.

"When we executed a search warrant at his home, we found 13 of these modems but we have no idea how many he might have sold in two years," Evans said.

Daniel Kennedy, a professor at the University of Detroit Mercy who teaches Internet security, said the popularity of the Internet spurs illegal activity.

"It's kind of like the arms race between safe manufacturers and safe crackers which has been going on for about 150 years," he said. "I build a better safe and you figure a way how to crack it, and get into it and I build a safe that takes into account what you just did to my safes and you do the next thing and on down the line.

"What we have here is a new product to criminalize and touch the arms race off again, but this in the electronic IP industry so here we go again," Kennedy said. He said he expects cable providers will come up with something to disarm this scam and the bad guys will try something else.

The sheriff said undercover deputies contacted Sturm through his online advertising and bought a unit for \$200. When deputies raided Sturm's home, they also found he was stealing cable service by tapping into a neighbor's line. Sturm's preliminary examination is Nov. 5.

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Sturm



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