

It's all Geek to Me!!

Is Bill Gates really giving away money??



free beer.

People get them every day and wonder if it's real. Since they don't know what to do they send it on and hope that it's true. What is it? E-Mail Hoaxes! P.T Barnum is known for saying there's a sucker born every minute, and some of these messages are hoping to cash in on that theory.

That's right; some of those e-mail stories are not true. For example Bill Gates (or Disney, AOL, The Gap, etc.) don't have an e-mail tracker and will not send you cash or merchandise if you forward a message to everyone you know. Neiman Marcus did not charge someone \$250 dollars for a cookie recipe and the Miller Brewing Company is not giving away

When it comes to tracking e-mail, there is no program for that. Even if there was, Bill Gates, Disney, AOL, etc. have better things to spend their money on than to give it away. I was even listening to the radio this week and the Neiman Marcus cookie story was being told on the air as a true story.

Some of these messages are scams that have been around for years and have been taken into the age of technology because of the opportunity to reach out and touch so many people at very little cost. Because e-mail is so easy and inexpensive to pass on many of these stories are still around after decades.

The Neiman Marcus cookie story goes something like this:

My daughter and I had just finished a salad at a Neiman-Marcus Cafe in Dallas, and we decided to have a small dessert. Because both of us are such cookie lovers, we decided to try the "Neiman-Marcus cookie. It was so excellent that I asked if they would give me the recipe, and the waitress said with a small frown, "I'm afraid not, but you can buy the recipe." Well, I asked how much, and she responded, "Only two fifty-it's a great deal!" I agreed to that, and told her to just add it to my tab. Thirty days later, I received my VISA statement, and the Neiman-Marcus charge was \$285.00! I looked again, and I remembered I had only spent \$9.95 for two salads and about \$20.00 for a scarf. As I glanced at the bottom of the statement, it said, "Cookie Recipe-\$250.00." That was outrageous!

To make a longer story short, the woman is mad about being charged and is now giving away the recipe. I've read that a variant of this story goes back to the 1940's. Neiman Marcus got so tired of the bad press that they posted the recipe on their Web Site (go to <http://www.neimanmarcus.com> and search for "cookie recipe").

Some of these messages look pretty real, include the company logos and are easy to believe. If any message is asking for your personal information (Credit Card Number, Social Security Number, PINs, etc) then you should contact the company directly. Do not use e-mail to transmit any sensitive information. Once these people have your identity, you'll have years of fun trying to get your credit straightened out.

Did you also know that there is a new type of insurance out for Identity Theft? With the growing problem of Identity Theft, several Insurance Companies are now providing insurance to help protect you from this problem. Of course nothing will protect you more than using caution as to when and where you give out confidential information.

If you get a message and wonder if it's a real thing, check out <http://hoaxbusters.ciac.org>, they have a pretty hefty list of hoaxes for you to check out. When I get a message that doesn't sound quite right, I scan the hoax busters site to see if they have anything similar. I also remember what my dad used to tell me when I was a kid, if it's too good to be true, it's probably not.

If you have questions or information that you would like to read about in this column, please send your ideas to contact@cbtechserv.com.

Steve Cote is the owner of Copper Beech Technology Services, located in Salem, NH. Steve has been involved in the computer industry since 1982. Started in 2003, Copper Beech Technology provides onsite computer support services to residential and small business customers in the Merrimack Valley and surrounding communities. These services include PC installation, repairs, upgrades, network installations, virus detection/removal as well as web and e-mail hosting services. You can contact Copper Beech Technology by e-mail at contact@cbtechserv.com. Appointments can also be scheduled by calling 866-SOS-GEEK (767-4335).