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Online Scams, New Survey Finds

Vast Majority Want Top Internet Companies to Do More to Combat Illegal Activities on the Web

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The Internet is becoming more important to our daily lives, but many Americans believe it has also become more risky over the last five years, especially for seniors. And having felt the pain of an online scam, they want the nation's top Internet companies to take a bigger role in making the Internet safer, according to a new survey released today by the Digital Citizens, a new organization launched this week.

The survey, conducted by Hart Research Associates, found that 77 percent of Americans think the Internet has become more risky for seniors.

Digital Citizens' launch is timely given the holiday shopping season, when 147 million mobile and online shoppers are expected to search for gifts on the Internet. Unfortunately, retailers are not the only ones trying to reap the rewards of record setting online sales. Trend Micro statistics show that there are now over 10 million virus infected Web links and dozens of scams used by cyber criminals attempting to steal information and money from unsuspecting shoppers. These statistics point out that as the Internet becomes more prevalent so do its criminal elements.

Digital Citizens is a coalition focused on educating the public and policy makers about the threats that consumers face on the Internet, and the importance for government and Internet companies to make the Web a safer place. Digital Citizens strongly believes that addressing these challenges requires the active participation of all Internet stakeholders – individuals, governments, and industry – to make the Internet safer. By working together, we can ensure these challenges are solved in a cooperative fashion.

According to the Hart research conducted this fall, many Americans have firsthand

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especially for society's most vulnerable. We need to help consumers so they don't become victims – from counterfeit drugs, online scams or virus-laden videos or software,” said Tom Galvin, Executive Director of Digital Citizens. “As a nation, we have to take this threat seriously. There is a role for individuals, to better protect themselves; for government, to create stiffer penalties and enforce the laws against those who harm Americans; and, for the companies, to work together despite competing interests to find solutions that Internet users desperately need.”

Americans want the companies that drive the Internet's future to do more to protect them. Sixty-three percent of Americans believe that top Internet companies are not doing enough to combat illegal activities on the Web. And perhaps more alarming, two out of every three Americans (62 percent) think that the nation's top Internet companies are making money off illicit activities such as online scams and theft of creative content such as movies and music, and illegal prescription drugs. Of that group, 38 percent believe the companies unknowingly make money off illicit activities, but 24 percent believe they know it and do it anyway.

These efforts are needed because online criminals are becoming more sophisticated in how they dupe Americans. Earlier this year, for example, it was reported that men claiming to be agents of the Drug Enforcement Administration threatened Americans who bought prescription drugs online. Threatening arrest, the “DEA Agents” would agree to not pursue charges if the victim forked over thousands of dollars. In one case, a woman committed suicide when faced with the threats.

“The Internet is still new to many of our citizens, and because it's new it opens them up to scams and actions that can have horrible consequences,” added Garth Bruen, a Digital Citizens' Security Fellow and member of the group's Advisory Board. “By sharing our experiences with each other, we can make the Internet a safer and better place for all of our citizens.”

Scams and illicit online activities are seemingly becoming increasingly connected. In

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