



OBITUARY SCAMS AIDED BY AI

BY JAY BORDEN

About a year ago we wrote an Insight on how someone passing away doesn't make them safe from identity thieves. Now another scam taking advantage of the recently-deceased has surfaced. In this one scammers create fake obituaries for people who have recently passed away.

These scammers use Search Engine Optimization, SEO, to have their obituary show up at the top of the search page listings. SEO is a legitimate technique used by companies to get their product higher in the search results.

In this case the scammers use it to get people to click on their link to read the obituary. The link does go to an obituary, but it is a fake one created using AI, artificial intelligence. AI is used because it can generate reasonable sounding obituaries very quickly, faster than people can.

Why do the scammers post the obituary so quickly? The family are often in shock when it first happens. Then they need to take care of funeral arrangements, legal obligations, notifying the life insurance carrier, social security administration, an attorney or executor of the will, etc. before issuing an obituary to notify family members, friends, work colleagues, and members of any organizations or clubs the deceased belonged to.

But AI doesn't have any of those other obligations. It just gathers information about the deceased from the internet. It will use any source it can find. There is usually enough public information available to create an obituary. In one such example the AI system used information from a Facebook group the deceased belonged to.

Then, AI using this information, will do what it does best, create something that resembles other things written in that category, in this case obituaries. Presto, a reasonable sounding obituary.

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Most people, family, friends, and coworkers, on hearing about the passing of someone they knew will go on line and search for an obituary to get more details. Scammers make the obituary more believable by posting it on fake funeral home and memorial group sites. Different versions are published on the different sites.

In one example to make things look real and legitimate anyone attempting to access the fake obituary was presented with a Captcha, the device used to prove you are a real person.

Completing it caused a pop-up saying your machine is infected. The goal of this particular scam was to get people to purchase McAfee anti-virus software. The scammers then got paid a commission for selling McAfee.

Scammers doing their work to sell antimalware is very strange. It's similar to breaking people's windows to increase business for a glass replacement company.

In other instances, the object is to spread malware. It's very easy if the AI generated obituary is the first one available. Going to the site will download malware. People will also share the link with others who knew the deceased. If the person uses that device for work, the malware will spread to other devices in the company.

In positive news, Google has made changes to their searches in an attempt to eliminate results that are probably AI generated. Google said, "we expect that the combination of this update and our previous efforts will collectively reduce low-quality, unoriginal content in search results by 40%."

That is a good step. But it means that 60% may still get through.

After someone passes people are susceptible to scams because of the emotional vulnerability and the desire for information.

But it is still a time to be careful as the unscrupulous have no respect for your loss or for anyone other than themselves.

To learn all the ways we can help make your company and family safer, visit onebrightlycyber.com, contact OneBrightlyCyber at info@onebrightlycyber.com, or call (888) 773-1920.