

# FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

## Trapped in the Tangled Web: Web Scheme Diverts Consumers from Their Intended Sites

Washington, DC— Visitors to some popular websites are being diverted to other sites, then inundated with advertisements for online gambling, sweepstakes, lotteries, psychics, instant credit, and pornography. To add insult to injury, the consumers can't leave the sites. When they click on the "back" button or try to close the webpage or browser, they may actually launch new pages. They are stuck in websites they had no intention of visiting, and their computers are effectively disabled from performing other functions. Too often, the only way out of this "tangled web" is to shut down the computer. But that can result in the loss of information or data that may have been open in another application.

Thanks to investigators at the Federal Trade Commission, just such a web scheme has been shut down. Here's how the scheme worked: An unscrupulous website developer created webpages with domain names that are misspellings of other domain names, transposed or inverted words, terms or phrases, or names that are similar to the names of well known companies. When consumers mistyped a URL (cartoonnetwok.com instead of cartoonnetwork.com, for example) into their browser, they were directed to a website or series of sites where they were bombarded with advertising, literally trapped in a tangle of webpages.

If you find yourself trapped in webpages you can't escape from, your only option may be to shut down your computer.

Can you avoid being trapped in a tangled web? Not always. But the FTC suggests that using a search engine to find the websites you're interested in visiting may help minimize the chances. Many search engines recognize and correct misspellings, and direct you to the site you want to visit. In addition, the FTC says, there are two concrete steps you can take to lessen the potential damage to your data if you get trapped:

- ◆ Consider closing other computer programs (i.e. word processing) before going online, and
- ◆ Save word processing and data information often.

If you get trapped in a tangle of web pages, file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission, toll-free, at 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357), or use the complaint form at [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov). Tell the FTC the name of the site you intended to visit and the name of the site(s) to which you were diverted.

The Federal Trade Commission, the nation's consumer protection champion, works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. The FTC enters Internet, identity theft, telemarketing, and other fraud related complaints into **Consumer Sentinel**, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.