

Scammers using device releases to steal personal data, money

SCAMMERS have exploited awaited smartphone releases through pre-launch fraud schemes requiring upfront payment or personal financial information, according to cybersecurity firm Kaspersky.

Unsuspecting consumers face potential data and financial losses through these schemes, Kaspersky said in a statement on Tuesday.

“In the digital age, scammers are constantly adapting and ex-

ploiting our excitement for the latest tech trends,” Tatyana Kulikova, security expert at Kaspersky, said.

“It’s crucial for consumers to stay vigilant, verify offers, and safeguard their personal information,” she added. “If something seems too good to be true, it often is.”

The Philippines was the second most-attacked country by web threats worldwide last year with 39,387,052 detected cases, data from Kaspersky showed.

Recently, scammers have claimed to provide exclusive pre-release Apple iPhone 15 units, Kaspersky said.

“Users are asked to provide personal identification details such as their name, address, and phone number,” it said. “Following the submission of payment, the scammers vanish, leaving victims without the promised iPhone and deprived of their funds.”

“Beyond the financial risks, this scam also raises significant privacy concerns, as the pilfered data may potentially be sold on the Dark Market,” Kaspersky added.

Giveaway schemes are also used in these scams, where customers are instructed to pay a small fee, often disguised as a “processing” or “registration” fee, for a chance to win a new smartphone, it said.

“Users are drawn in by the allure of a free iPhone 15, perfectly complementing their anticipation for the impending release,” it said.

Customers should verify the source, avoid up-front payments, look at official channels and check reviews, especially for pre-release purchases, to avoid becoming a victim of these schemes, Kaspersky said. — **M.H.L. Antivola**

Apple unveils iPhone 15 Pro with titanium case, holds line on prices

CUPERTINO, California — Apple launched a new series of iPhones that included a new titanium shell, a faster chip and improved video game playing abilities.

The biggest surprise with the iPhone 15 that will come out Sept. 22: It did not raise prices, reflecting the global smartphone slump.

The event at Apple’s Cupertino, California, headquarters comes amid lingering economic uncertainty, especially in China, Apple’s third-largest market where it faces challenges from expanded restrictions on using its iPhones in government offices and the first new flagship phone in several years from Huawei Technologies.

Huawei raised its second-half shipment target for the new Mate 60 series smartphone, which has satellite capability, by 20%, the country’s official Securities Times reported on Tuesday shortly before the Apple event.

Apple did not deliver any blockbuster surprises, and shares closed down 1.7% after event.

APPLE EMBEDDING MACHINE LEARNING

While Apple avoids the terms artificial intelligence, or AI, the technology was the driver of several new features.

An Apple executive said the company used machine learning to detect a person in the frame, allowing users to turn a picture into a portrait immediately or later in the Photos app.

Apple also showed off new watches, including a Series 9 Watch with a feature called “double tap” where users tap thumb and finger together twice, without touching the watch, in order to perform tasks like answering a phone call.

It uses machine learning to detect tiny changes in blood flow when the user taps their fingers together, freeing up the other hand for other tasks like walking a dog or holding a cup of coffee, said Apple Chief Operating Officer Jeff Williams.

IPHONE 15 LAUNCH

Both the Pro and other iPhone 15 models will have a brighter display and a 48-megapixel camera as well as 100% recycled cobalt in their batteries.

Apple said the iPhone 15’s satellite connectivity can now be used to summon roadside assistance. It is rolling out the feature out with the American Automobile Association in the United States.

Apple said that USB-C charging cables are coming to both its iPhone 15 and the charging case of its AirPods Pro devices. The move reflects re-

quirements from European regulators to use USB-C and allows the use of the same charging cables already used for iPads and Macs.

“I was expecting Apple to try and spin the all USB-C decision in certain way but they didn’t they were very matter of fact in the way they talked about it,” said Carolina Milanesi, an analyst with Creative Strategies. She said the shift “brought some differentiation to the iPhone Pro, because there’s faster throughput for data transfer. That is going to be valuable for people” who use the device for professional photography, Ms. Milanesi said.

Apple also said the iPhone 15 Pro can capture what it calls “spatial videos” by using two of the device’s cameras to capture a three-dimensional video. Those videos will be viewable on Apple’s Vision Pro headset that is due out early next year, marketing chief Greg Joswiak said.

The Pro’s use of titanium makes it lighter and stronger than previous models of other metals.

Bob O’Donnell, head of TECHNalysis Research said the steady prices were a surprise.

“I think both Apple and the carriers recognize that with consumers feeling pressure on their budget and the lack of dramatic changes it’s getting harder to convince people

to upgrade. Keeping prices stable should help with that,” he said.

The iPhone 15 costs \$799, the iPhone 15 Plus starts at \$899, and the Pro series starts at \$999. The Pro Max starts at \$1,199, the same prices as last year for the same levels of storage. Last year, Apple offered a \$1,099 iPhone Pro Max model with less memory.

Apple still relies on iPhone for more than half of its sales, but the global smartphone market has slumped from shipping 294.5 million total phones to 268 million in the second quarter. Apple’s shipments declined the least of any major smartphone maker, dropping from 46.5 million phones to 45.3 million, according to data from Counterpoint Research.

NEW WATCH OUT

The outdoor sports-focused Apple Watch Ultra 2 has new features for cycling and diving and what Apple said is the brightest screen it has ever made. The Series 9 will start at \$399 and the Ultra 2 watch will start at \$799 and be available Sept. 22.

Apple will no longer use leather in any of its products, said Lisa Jackson, the company’s environmental chief. The company is replacing some of those products with a textile called “FineWoven” that it says feel like suede. — **Reuters**

French watchdog halts iPhone 12 sales over too-high radiation — minister

PARIS — Apple must stop selling its iPhone 12 model in France due to above-threshold radiation levels, France’s junior minister for the digital economy told newspaper Le Parisien in an interview published on Tuesday.

France’s radiation watchdog ANFR notified Apple of its decision to ban iPhone 12 sales after it had carried out tests which showed the smartphone’s Specific Absorption Rate (SAR) was slightly higher than legally allowed, Jean-Noel Barrot told the paper.

Apple did not immediately reply to a Reuters request for comment.

Mr. Barrot said a software update would be sufficient to fix the radiation issues linked to the phone which the US company has been selling since 2020.

“Apple is expected to respond within two weeks,” he said, adding: “If they fail to do so, I am prepared to order a recall of all iPhones 12 in circulation. The rule is the same for everyone, including the digital giants.”

The European Union (EU) has set safety limits for SAR values linked to exposure to mobile phones, which could increase the risk of some forms of cancer according to scientific studies.

The French watchdog will now pass on its findings to regulators in other EU member states. “In practical terms, this decision could have a snowball effect,” said Mr. Barrot.

In 2020, France widened regulations requiring retailers to display the radiation value of products on packaging beyond cell phones, including tablets and other electronic devices. — **Reuters**

British firm Inchcape mulls distribution of mass-market cars in the Philippine market

BRITISH AUTOMOTIVE distributor Inchcape PLC said it is looking at the distribution of mass-market vehicles in the Philippines with its aim to serve all market segments.

“It is our job to make sure that we are bringing the right vehicles that are affordable to the consumers,” Duncan Andrew Tait, chief executive officer of Inchcape, said in an interview with ANC on Wednesday.

He said the company’s recent deal with China’s Changan International Corp. will help it achieve this goal. The deal made the joint venture of Inchcape and CATS Group of Companies the official distributor of the Chinese company’s products.

Last month, Inchcape announced that the joint venture — Inchcape Philippines — will be operating the distributorship of Changan vehicles in the Philippines.

The partnership covers Changan’s Alsvin Sedan, CS35 Plus compact crossover, CS55 Plus compact SUV, UNI-T, and UNI-K.

Changan has continuing investments in new energy vehicles, which are seen to expand its electric vehicle (EV) offering, Inchcape has said.

“We are also now looking at new energy vehicles like hybrids and EVs. And to make sure that they are affordable for the consumers as we bring it into the markets,” said Mr. Tait.

On whether the move to enter the mass market would dilute the luxury branding attached to CATS Group of Companies, Mr. Tait said the

company’s job is to “serve all segments of the market and do so successfully for consumers and our automotive manufacturing partners.”

He added that it is just about time for the company to enter the mass market considering the growth in its market share in the Philippines.

“Today we have a reasonable market share in the Philippines. When you look at some markets like Chile, where we have 25% market share, we are able to support consumers from their first ever vehicle right to the point where the consumers are super financially successful and want to move to more luxury vehicles,” he said.

“Our job is to make sure that we can serve for their whole life regardless of where they are in their mobility journey,” he added.

Mr. Tait also said that Inchcape is optimistic about the Philippine market, adding that the company entered the market believing in its medium- and long-term growth.

“We don’t enter the market for how we are going to perform in the next month, next quarter, or the next six months. We enter them for the medium- and longer-term,” he said.

“And we are very positive about the market here, with the good gross domestic product growth, 110 million population inside the Philippines, a young vibrant population that bodes well for the future growth of automotive,” he added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Vista Land plans P35-billion bond offering

THE VILLARS’ Vista Land & Lifescapes, Inc. said on Wednesday that it is planning to register a three-year bond offering of up to P35 billion.

In a stock exchange disclosure, Vista Land said its board had approved the company’s application with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to register the peso-denominated fixed-rate bonds.

According to the company, the bonds will be issued in tranches within a three-year period. The initial tranche will involve the offer and issuance of up to P10 bil-

lion fixed-rate bonds consisting of up to P6 billion base offer and an oversubscription option of up to P4 billion.

Vista Land is tycoon Manuel B. Villar, Jr.’s listed holding firm engaged in developing residential subdivisions and construction of housing and condominium units.

“The board of directors of the company has authorized management to determine such other terms and conditions of the offer, as may be advantageous to the company and in accordance with the scope of authority given by the board,

including, but not limited to, the determination of the interest rate of the offer bonds, and the subsequent offerings out of the shelf registration of the shelf bonds,” Vista Land said.

Vista Land said China Bank Capital Corp., SB Capital Investment Corp., and Union Bank of the Philippines are the joint lead underwriters and joint bookrunners for the issuance.

The listed firm’s counsel for the offer is Picazo Buyco Tan Fider & Santos while Romulo Mabanta Buenaventura Sayoc & de los Angeles will serve as coun-

sel to the joint lead underwriters and joint bookrunners.

“The company shall make additional disclosures in respect of the offer in due course,” Vista Land said.

In the first half, Vista Land posted an 83% increase in net income to P5.8 billion from P3.18 billion a year ago. The company’s consolidated revenues rose 8% to P18.35 billion versus P16.97 billion previously.

On Wednesday, shares of Vista Land at the local bourse increased four centavos or 2.55% to close at 1.61 apiece. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochoa**

Globe expands 5G coverage with 356 new sites

GLOBE TELECOM, Inc. has built about 356 new fifth-generation (5G) sites as it aims to expand 5G coverage in the country, the listed telecommunications company said on Wednesday.

“Our relentless pursuit of expanding 5G technology is a testament to Globe’s dedication to innovation and our commitment to our customers,” Joel R. Agustin, senior vice-president and head of network planning and engineering at Globe’s network technical group, said in a media release.

“We believe in the transformative power of 5G to enhance the digital lives of Filipinos,” he added.

Its efforts to deploy 5G sites have resulted in 5G outdoor coverage of 97.44% in the National Capital Region and 91% in parts of Visayas and Mindanao, Globe said.

5G technology allows quick data or data transfer rates, expansive reach, and steadier connectivity.

Globe earlier set a capital expenditure budget of around \$1.3

billion for this year. It previously said that it had spent about P37.7 billion in the first six months as its commitment to infrastructure development.

Its first-semester spending represents a 25% decline from the level in the same period last year. The company said it is expecting to reach about P71.5 billion or \$1.3 billion in spending by the end of the year.

“Our continuous infrastructure investment is focused on uplifting customer experience,

delivering a highly consistent and available network. These investments cover capacity and coverage expansion to improve service performance, network fortification to further improve service availability, and continuous optimization to improve service quality,” Mr. Agustin said.

Earlier this month, Nokia Corp. said it was deploying its latest interleaved passive active antennas for Globe to help advance 5G deployment in the Philippines. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

BayaniPay aims to bring payment platform to Canada

GLOBAL PAYMENT solution platform BayaniPay targets to bring its presence to Canada after expanding its seed funding to \$6.6 million, its top official said.

“We’ll follow where the Filipino money is. Next, we will be in Canada,” BayaniPay Chief Executive Officer Winston L. Damarillo said during a press briefing on Wednesday.

The company said it was able to secure an additional \$2.1 million in a funding round with existing investors. It earlier secured about \$4.5 million in seed funding, al-

lowing it to enhance its product features and expand to new territories. Its existing investors are Talino Ventures and PTGB, the company said in a media release.

BayaniPay said that with the additional funding, it intends to bankroll new projects such as developing a rewards system and expanding in North America where a huge Filipino population resides.

The platform has reached about P100 million worth of transaction value per month, marking a significant increase

from the monthly average of P30.64 million recorded last year.

“We are on track to meet this milestone, as we continue to acquire more customers each month. The demand for BayaniPay continues to grow as more and more Filipinos see the value and benefit of convenience while allowing them to enjoy zero fees and competitive foreign exchange rates,” Mr. Damarillo said.

The financial technology or fintech company aims to reach about P1 billion in total

transaction value this year, Mr. Damarillo said.

“We aim to sustain this momentum and explore new territories. Our commitment towards improving and growing our platform is driven by the desire to make the lives of Filipinos easier, wherever they may be found,” he said.

To date, BayaniPay caters only to customers in California, Hawaii, New Jersey, and Alaska through remittance and direct payments to service providers in the country. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**