ACCOUNTAX SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, INCORPORATED

Continuing Education for IRS Enrolled Agents, Certified Public Accountants, and Practicing Attorneys

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Protect Your Clients; Protect Yourself: Tax Security 101

." The Security Summit awareness campaign is intended to provide tax professionals with the basic information they need to better protect taxpayer data and to help prevent the filing of fraudulent tax returns. Although the Security Summit -- a partnership between the IRS, states and the private-sector tax community -- is making progress against tax-related identity theft, cybercriminals continue to evolve, and data thefts at tax professionals' offices are on the rise. Thieves use stolen data from tax practitioners to create fraudulent returns that are harder to detect.

For those who fall for a spear-phishing scam and ultimately allow a thief to access their email account, the criminal can use that access to create additional spear phish scams. The criminal does this by targeting those with whom the original user has exchanged emails, including clients, colleagues and friends.

Tips for tax professionals to avoid phishing scams

Educated employees are the key to avoiding phishing scams, but these simple steps also can help protect against stolen data:

•Use separate personal and business email accounts; protect email accounts with strong passwords and two-factor authentication if available.

- Install an anti-phishing tool bar to help identify known phishing sites. Anti-phishing tools may be included in security software products.
- Use security software to help protect systems from malware and scan emails for viruses.
- Never open or download attachments from unknown senders, including potential clients; make contact first by phone, for example.
- Send only password-protected and encrypted documents if files must be shared with clients via email.
- Do not respond to suspicious or unknown emails; if IRS-related, forward to phishing@irs.gov.

In addition to these steps, the Security Summit reminds all professional tax preparers that they must have a written data security plan as required by the Federal Trade Commission and its Safeguards Rule.

Tax professionals can get help with security recommendations by reviewing the recently revised IRS Publication 4557, Safeguarding Taxpayer Data, and Small Business Information Security: the Fundamentals by the National Institute of Standards and Technology. Publication 5293, Data Security Resource Guide for Tax Professionals, provides a compilation of data theft information available on IRS.gov. Also, tax professionals should stay connected to the IRS through subscriptions to e-News for Tax Professionals, QuickAlerts and Social Media.