4:31 PM (ET) 9/11

`Cybersting' Targets Pirates

NEWARK, N.J. (AP) -- An on-line invitation to buy stolen computer data led to the arrest of six computer users and the seizure of more than 20 computer systems, the U.S. Secret Service announced Monday. [redacted] b7E

``Operation Cybersnare'' sought computer users who were dealing in stolen cellular telephone and credit card data worth millions of dollars, said Peter A. Cavicchia II, special agent in charge of the Secret Service's office for New Jersey, where the sting was based.

Agents have arrested suspects in California, Michigan, Texas, and Brooklyn, N.Y. They also grabbed computer hardware and data in those states as well as Alaska, Connecticut, New Jersey and Virginia.

``What we really did was set up an old-fashioned `swag shop' in cyberspace,'' said Assistant U.S. Attorney Donna A. Krappa, who is prosecuting the case. A swag shop is an establishment where stolen goods are traded.

The eight-month investigation was based in Bergen County, where an undercover Secret Service agent using the name ``Carder One'' and a confidential informant operated a private computer bulletin board system called ``Celco 51,'' authorities said.

A bulletin board is an electronic meeting place where computer users can exchange information. During the probe, officers identified people broke into computers and stole information to get free cellular phone service, authorities said.

Over the Internet, the undercover team advertised that Celco 51 catered to those involved with all aspects of computer fraud, court papers said.

The cellular phone fraud targeted in this case is usually accomplished by stealing electronic serial numbers and mobile identification numbers, authorities said.

Pairs of these numbers are programmed into cell phones and establish billing for customers. People have broken into computer systems operated by cellular companies and stolen blocks of pairs, authorities said.

A pair of active numbers can be programmed into a cellular phone. Calls made on the ``cloned'' phone are charged to the legitimate user, who only discovers the fraud when [redacted] b3 b6 b7C b7E

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