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StopBadware.org and CDT File Formal Complaint with FTC Against Spyware Operator

FastMP3Search.com complaint coincides with release of StopBadware.org report

Cambridge, MA and Washington, DC - 12/7/2006 - StopBadware.org, the consumer protection initiative developed to combat badware, along with the Center for Democracy & Technology, today announced they have filed a formal complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) against FastMP3Search.com.ar for distributing badware to unsuspecting Internet users through its web-based software download. The complaint seeks immediate action against its owners and operators to prevent a wide range of harm to Internet users caused by the software plug-in distributed on the FastMP3Search.com.ar web site.

Today, StopBadware.org also released a report naming the FastMP3Search.com.ar Plugin to its "Badware List," coinciding with the FTC complaint. This report is the most recent in a series released by Harvard Law School's Berkman Center for Internet & Society and Oxford University's Oxford Internet Institute as a part of an ongoing effort to battle harmful and deceptive programs such as spyware.

"In the past year, we've come across dozens of malicious programs available on hundreds of web sites, and without question, the FastMP3Search.com.ar Plugin tops our list of the worst actors," said John Palfrey, co-director of StopBadware.org and executive director of the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School. "The reason why we are issuing such a critical report on the FastMP3Search.com.ar Plugin and filing this complaint with the FTC is because they've combined so many bad things in a single bundle. It's a parade of horrors. Most notably, the application disables a user's firewall automatically without informing the user. We recommend that users do not download the FastMP3Search.com.ar Plugin, and we urge the FTC to take action to protect consumers from this bad application."

Ari Schwartz, deputy director of the Center for Democracy & Technology, agreed. "Scams like FastMP3Search.com do immeasurable damage, not just to their own unsuspecting 'customers' but to the Internet as a whole. Beyond the quantifiable harm they inflict on their victims, these scam artists strike at the heart of the consumer confidence that sustains the Internet as a vibrant tool for communication and commerce," Schwartz said. "Every time the FTC goes after one of these scammers, it sends an important message to those who seek to turn a profit by exploiting unsuspecting Internet users."

The complaint and the StopBadware.org report both describe how the FastMP3Search.com.ar Plugin self-executes the installation of adware and Trojan horse applications, installs additional undisclosed software, disables the Windows Firewall, sabotages valid web addresses for legitimate security companies, changes homepage settings, and severely impairs computer speed and performance, in each case without the knowledge or consent of the user.

StopBadware.org's testing also shows that the FastMP3Search.com.ar Plugin is virtually impossible for the average user to uninstall.

"The FTC complaint and our report are part of an ongoing effort to identify bad code on the Internet, so that Internet users won't have to retreat to digital walled gardens," said Jonathan Zittrain, StopBadware.org co-director and professor of Internet Governance and Regulation at Oxford University. "The operators of this website have covered their tracks, and not being able to identify the correct persons responsible, or even the website's true country of origin, makes it more difficult to exert community pressure to get them to change their ways. By filing a formal complaint with the FTC, we hope to bring additional effort to bear against rogue sites and

software. The growth of the Internet depends on user confidence. We hope the Commission, through its authority to challenge practices affecting commerce that are deceptive and unfair, will investigate the owners and operators of FastMP3Search.com.ar and take appropriate action.”

Launched in January 2006, StopBadware.org's user-driven online community serves as a central resource to help educate people about badware and spotlight those companies who embed these programs into downloadable software applications. Internet users can visit StopBadware.org to check whether programs they want to download are infected with badware and alert others to programs they have encountered that include malicious software such as spyware, incessant pop-up ads, or other obtrusive programs.

StopBadware.org is the largest consumer protection initiative defining and combating bad code and sites and is led by Harvard Law School's Berkman Center for Internet & Society and Oxford University's Oxford Internet Institute. Consumer Reports WebWatch serves as an unpaid special advisor. The initiative is supported by high-tech companies, including Google, Lenovo, and Sun Microsystems. For more information, visit <http://www.stopbadware.org>.

The Center for Democracy and Technology works to promote democratic values and constitutional liberties in the digital age. With expertise in law, technology, and policy, CDT seeks practical solutions to enhance free expression and privacy in global communications technologies. CDT is dedicated to building consensus among all parties interested in the future of the Internet and other new communications media. For more information, visit <http://www.cdt.org>.

The FTC Complaint was prepared with the assistance of the Berkman Center's Clinical Program in Cyberlaw. For more information, visit <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/home/clinical>.

A copy of the formal complaint can be viewed at:

http://stopbadware.org/pdfs/fastmp3_ftc_complaint.pdf

A copy of the StopBadware.org report on FastMP3Search.com can be viewed at:

<http://stopbadware.org/reports/reportdisplay?reportname=fastmp3search>
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