Malware infections on the rise in the Rocket City

POSTED 10:31 PM, DECEMBER 2, 2014, BY CHRISTINE KILLIMAYER

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HUNTSVILLE, Ala. (WHNT) - Cyber criminals have Huntsville in their crosshairs.

"There is a tremendous amount of hacking and cyber security issues here in Huntsville," said GigaParts sales manager Ed Clifford.

The computer repair center at Gigaparts has seen an alarming increase in malware infections over the past few months.

Clifford says the Huntsville-based store fights more and more battles against CryptoWall, which is malware that holds your files hostage.

"This virus encrypts your files with military-grade encryption and once you have it, your files are done unless you pay the ransom."

Anyone is susceptible, including local business owners.

"What happens is employees will click on an infected link and it will go out through their network and if they don't have the appropriate security precautions, their whole system could be shut down," said Clifford.

Scammers are especially using this holiday time to prey on online shoppers.

According to data released by EnigmaSoftware.com, malware infections increased by nearly 33 percent this Cyber Monday from the average number of infections in the last month. The experts at Enigma analyzed infection scanning reports on thousands of its customers in Huntsville.

"The 33 percent spike in Huntsville Monday mirrors what we have seen in prior years," said Patrick Morganelli, Senior VP of Technology at Enigma Software. "In 2013 in Huntsville there was a spike of 7.14% on Cyber Monday. The holiday shopping season is one of the busiest times of year for the cyber crooks who spread malware. They know lots of people will be online looking for deals, and will be vulnerable."

Here are some of the most common ways that cyber crooks use the holiday shopping season to target computers for malware infections:

--Spam emails and links promising great deals. Malware makers know that people will be on the lookout for great prices on everything from Xboxes to phones. They'll send bogus emails promising super low prices. And those emails will links that can install malware if they are clicked. The bad guys will also post bad links in Facebook and Twitter accounts that they hijack.

--Fake emails that look like they are from real online retailers. Bad guys know it's likely you've bought something online from Amazon or Toys-R-Us. So they send fake emails that tell you there was a problem with your recent order, hoping you'll click on a link that will install malware.

--Poisoned search results. Sophisticated cyber crooks can create fake web pages promising to sell hot holiday items at very low prices. They can even work to make those pages show up in Google searches for particular products. If someone clicks over to the bogus page, an infection is just a few seconds away.

"These crooks know that people are looking for good deals, and are most likely in a hurry when checking emails and doing Google searches," Morganelli says. "And the infections they are creating are more diabolical than ever."

If you become a cyber crime victim, Clifford says to turn your computer off immediately and take it to a professional.

"If you're not a sophisticated user, you want to get professional help. In some cases, you can exacerbate the problem by trying to do it yourself."

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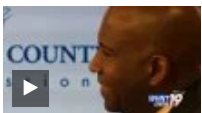
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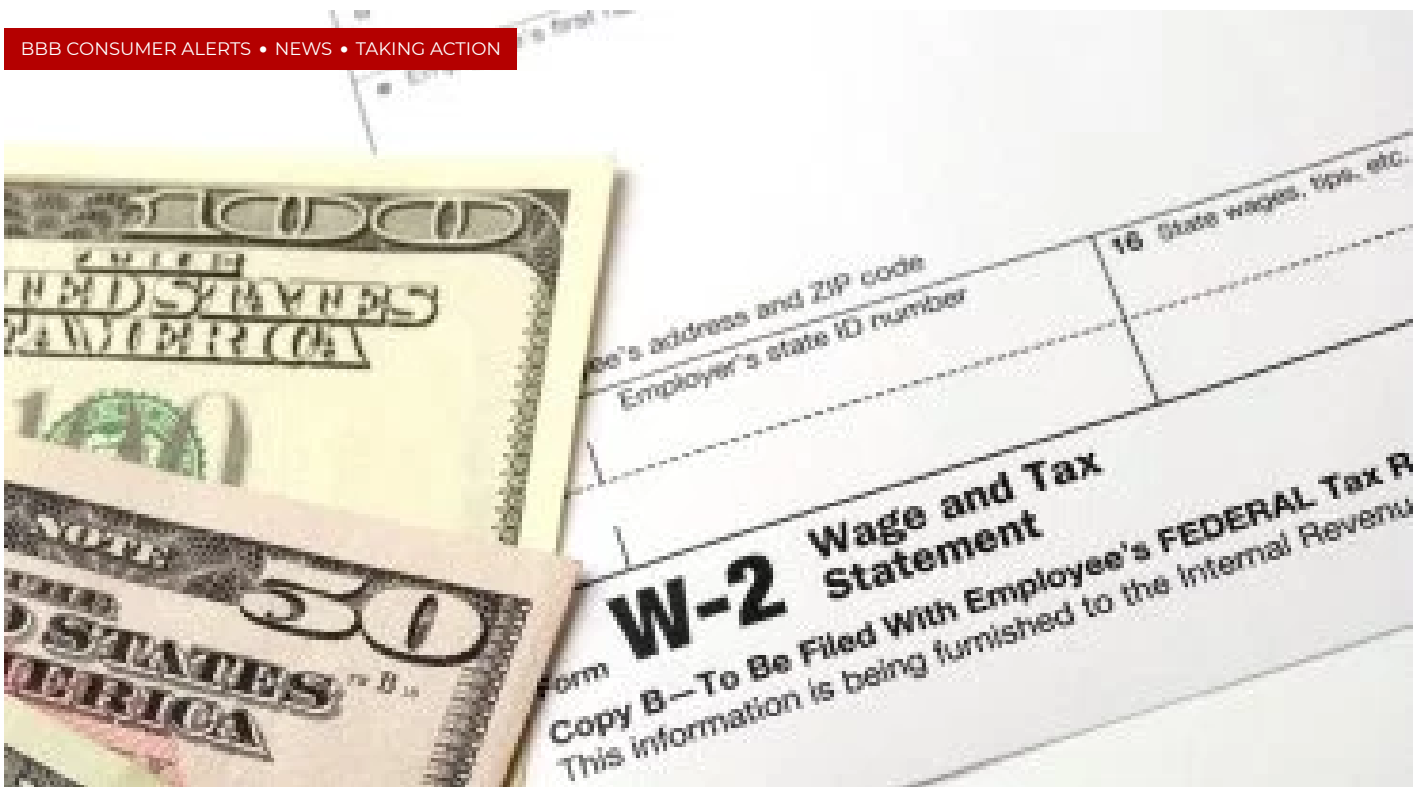
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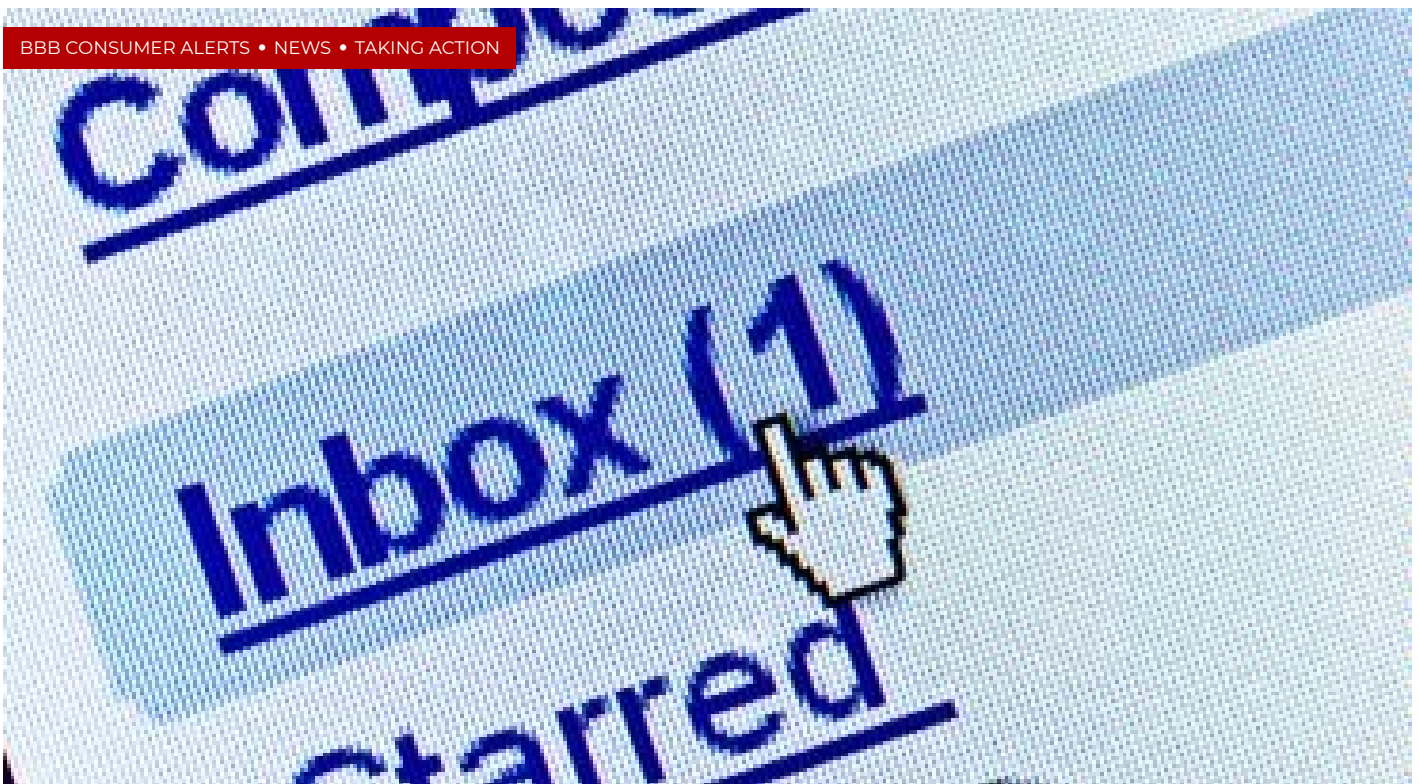
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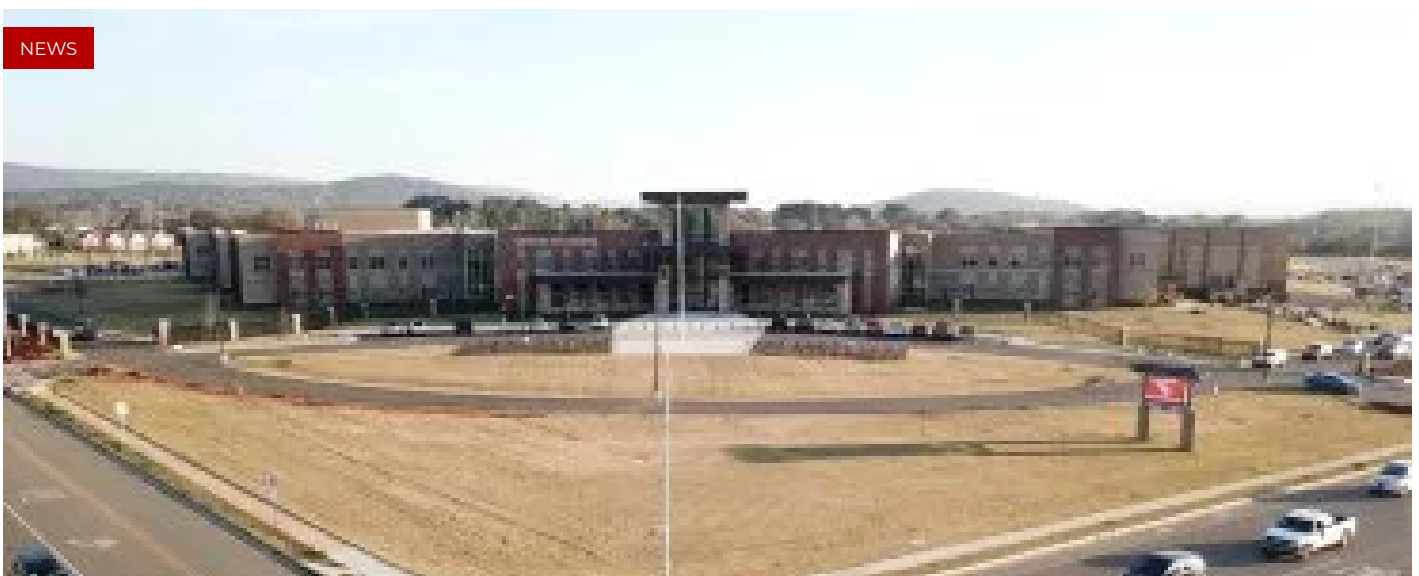**School security and safety are constant thoughts in area districts**

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